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**The History and  
Working Practices of the  
Propeller Theatre Company  
(1997-2011)**

by

Emma Poltrack

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature

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## Abbreviations and Conventions

### Plays

<i>3H6</i>	<i>Henry VI, part 3</i>
<i>Comedy</i>	<i>The Comedy of Errors</i>
<i>Dream</i>	<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>
<i>Shrew</i>	<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> (William Shakespeare)
<i>A Shrew</i>	<i>The Taming of a Shrew</i> (Anonymous)
<i>TWT</i>	<i>The Winter's Tale</i>

### Other

des.	designer
dir.	director
OP	Original Practice
NT	National Theatre
RSC	Royal Shakespeare Company

When not explicitly cited, quoted lines are transcribed from performance. In reference to Propeller's texts, quotations refer to the play texts published as part of *Propeller Shakespeare* series. In all other instances, references to Shakespeare are from *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, edited by Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett and William Montgomery (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

## **Acknowledgments**

First and foremost, this thesis simply would not exist without the support and guidance of Carol Rutter. Her constant encouragements to “Keep writing!” and valuable feedback have been incalculably beneficial, and I am deeply indebted to her for the care she has shown me throughout this process. Nick Monk and Emma Smith provided fresh eyes and insights when I felt unsteady, and the University of Warwick’s Thesis Writing Group and its members kept me focused and on track throughout that crucial period when researching turned into writing. Some of the ideas found within this project were tested and developed through the exposure given to them by the British Graduate Shakespeare Conference, and I am grateful for the delegates and organizers that continue to create a safe space for postgraduate students finding their feet. Hilary Taylor was the teacher that first introduced me to Propeller, and I can honestly say this project would not exist without her influence.

Throughout the years, the Propeller family has proven to be as enthusiastic and generous a group of people as anyone could hope to find. Nick Asbury, Dugald Bruce-Lockhart, Joseph Chance, Chris Myles, Bryony Rutter, Simon Scardifield, Nick Chesterfield, Laura Routledge, Helen Drew, James Tucker, Michael Pavelka, and Jon Trenchard have been gracious enough to share their time, efforts, and memories with me and I cannot thank them enough. In addition to sharing his Propeller experiences, Tony Bell offered the initial encouragement that saw this project move from theoretical to actual, and the access he gave me to his personal collection of Propeller paraphernalia provided key insights into Propeller’s early days without which the company’s development could not have been as accurately traced. Caro McKay similarly granted me access to the company’s accumulated records and for that (and the numerous cups of tea) I am deeply appreciative.

Jen Waghorn, Zachary Fithian, and Kath Bradley are some of the many people who have been kind enough to read over my work and give me feedback. No less important to me is the comfort and inspiration offered by Tom Disney, Elizabeth Sharrett, Doug Liman, Jenna Owen, Tanya Misfeldt, Carrie Smith, and Sean McNulty. I am blessed that the support I have found in England is more than matched by that radiating from the other side of the Atlantic. Terence Poltrack, Marianne Meyer, Grace Poltrack, and Kathleen Meyer are, collectively, the greatest family anyone could ask for and have seen me through the highs and lows of the last four years despite their distance. You are all deeply loved and appreciated. An extended family of sorts, Katie Koopman, Jackie Bello, and Jacey Powers have likewise had their presence felt from afar. Jason Burg has been there since the very beginning, and I still like Wednesdays because of that. Finally, Red Smucker-Green: housemate, copyeditor, cheerleader, psychiatrist, travel companion, spouse, and “sassy Southern voice of God.” Your influence is in every Oxford comma. I could never have done it without you.

I dedicate this thesis to the memory of Gena Rohlf's who used to joke she had “ruined” me when she cast me as a ten year old Lady Macbeth in our fifth grade play. Little did she know how right she was. Here's to you, Mrs. Rohlf's.



## **Declaration**

I certify that this thesis is my own work and that it has neither been submitted as part of a degree at a different university nor has it appeared in any published form.

## Abstract

My thesis examines the production practices of the Propeller Theatre Company, an all-male ensemble under the direction of Edward Hall. To date, Propeller has worked exclusively on Shakespeare's plays, staging eighteen full-length productions of eleven plays. The critical attention Propeller has received remains centered on its all-male casting, but my project goes beyond this aspect of Propeller's work to analyze how Propeller engages practically with Shakespeare's scripts and to what ends. As a touring company, Propeller has broad popular and commercial appeal, yet there exists little scholarship on the company. In addressing this gap, I demonstrate how Propeller offers something unique in Shakespearean performance as well as investigate the process by which the company produces Shakespeare's plays.

The first chapter begins the work of examining Propeller specifically through its director, Edward Hall, focusing on the way in which Hall's personal opinions regarding theatre and Shakespeare led to Propeller's evolution from a one-off production (*Henry V*, 1997) into an established company. Chapter two concentrates on how designer Michael Pavelka works with Hall in creating the conceptual framework for a production and how he creates scenic and costume designs for the company. The next chapter explores the effect of the Watermill Theatre's relative isolation on the company's early working practices, the consequences of the first-refusal policy, casting across and within productions (including cross-gender casting and the personation of women), the collaborative rehearsal process, music, and Propeller's approach to Shakespearean verse speaking. In the fourth chapter, I examine two productions — *The Taming of the Shrew* (2006) and *The Merchant of Venice* (2008) — as case studies of how the company performs Shakespeare. The concluding chapter examines the challenges facing Propeller as it attempts to balance a defined reputation with a desire to grow artistically as a company.

## Introduction

*A feeling of abandoned debauchery permeates the air. Dust sheets cover overturned furniture, bottles and glasses litter the edge of the stage, musical instruments lie haphazardly about, and a chandelier lies on its side as if shipwrecked. Though the auditorium lights are up, there is a haunted quality to the space, augmented by a gentle haze that drifts over the stage. Distracted by the audience's murmurings and restless settling into seats, you could be forgiven for not immediately seeing the man in the long dark coat and weather-beaten hat slink up the aisle towards the stage. It is not until he mounts the step and crosses to the center that you realize the play you are waiting to watch has already, inexplicably, begun. Without a word, the man looks at you — or seems to — and then slowly draws a bow across the violin he has crooked in his arm. The lights dim, and figures begin to emerge from the shadows of the stage, half masks obscuring their faces. It is a wake for ghosts. The music swells, and one of the sheets is suddenly pulled back to reveal an unmasked man in a disheveled suit, sitting in a chair. "If music be the food of love, play on."<sup>1</sup>*

So began Propeller Theatre Company's 2007 production of *Twelfth Night*. It was not the company's first production (that was 1997's *Henry V*) nor was it its London debut (2002's *Rose Rage* at the Royal Haymarket and 2003's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Comedy Theatre both preceded it). It was not even the first time Propeller had staged that particular play, as the 2007 staging bore strong echoes of Propeller's 1999 production. It was, however, my first experience with Propeller, and the encounter which inspired this project. Part of *Twelfth Night*'s effect on me can be attributed to failed expectations. Promotional materials for the production had displayed a single actor photographed against a white background, and Propeller's representative, Tam Williams, was displayed from the (bare) chest upwards. The left half of his face was unadorned while the right half was elaborately made-up with thick white foundation and heavy eye make-up reminiscent of kabuki performers. The metallic glint of a single earring could be seen in the long, dark red hair that comprised the half-wig trailing down the right side of Williams' face. Based on the posters I had seen, I

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, performance tableaux are based on personal observations of Propeller in performance.

braced myself for actors in elaborate costumes attempting to convince us in the audience that they were women through the use of ostentatious design and uncomfortable impressions of “feminine” qualities.

Entering the theatre, I was instead struck by the images described above. Constrained by the Old Vic’s marketing strategy, Propeller’s multi-faceted production aesthetic had been simplified into an image that foregrounded its single-gender casting. While Propeller’s existence as an all-male company is undeniably part of its core identity, it can also be replicated. What I witnessed that evening was a performance not so easily copied, built as it was from a complicated interplay of music, design, individual performance, group performance, lighting, text, audience interaction, and directorial approach. Over the next two-and-three-quarter hours, twelve men presented Shakespeare’s tale of loss, love, and reunion with equal parts humor and sadness. The furniture that had been draped with dust cloths to begin the production was manipulated by the actors as children might reinvent forgotten treasures long stored in an attic: a wardrobe became a magic cabinet into which Sebastian entered only to have Viola exit from the other side; the same wardrobe later served as the claustrophobic walls of Malvolio’s prison; a chest of drawers laid upon its side was the bar upon which Sir Toby danced to Feste’s early morning drinking songs. The figures in masks disappeared and reappeared, sometimes as silent observers of the action, sometimes as musicians, and sometimes as characters in the driving action, their masks and uniform suits exchanged for individual faces and costumes.<sup>2</sup> Burly shoulders peeked out from a strapless evening gown and hairy legs from a pencil skirt as men played at being women, simultaneously inviting the audience to play

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this project, I will be using the term “driving action” to refer to the interactions of the named characters within Propeller’s productions to differentiate from the overall narrative, which includes the choric framework.

along with them, preferring to embrace make-believe over any attempt at accurate impersonation. Michael Billington, reviewing the production for *The Guardian*, concluded, “They say there is a perfect *Twelfth Night* laid up for us in heaven. In the meantime there is a magnificent one available in the Cut.”<sup>3</sup> I strongly agreed.

I start this project by locating myself not as a researcher, but as a spectator to draw attention to Propeller’s primary focus: performing Shakespeare for modern audiences. It sounds obvious but too often performance goals are overshadowed by the political, theoretical, or methodological aims of a company or director. Unlike other theatre companies seeking to define a new theatrical model, Propeller has created a company whose primary focus is what the audience sees onstage.

Interviewed during the 1998 tour of *Henry V*, Propeller’s director, Edward Hall, said:

I am trying to take classical traditions and fuse them with contemporary aesthetics. This process produces the kind of performance which I feel has the same spirit the plays enjoyed in the 16th century. If someone can’t walk in from the street, watch our production and enjoy it, then we’ve not done our job.<sup>4</sup>

Hall’s statement makes passing reference to a view of authentic Shakespeare by hoping to invoke the “spirit” of the plays’ original performances, but simultaneously positions that authenticity as based off of his personal understanding rather than historical research. This understanding is based off of creating productions that are both accessible and enjoyable, crediting the “job” of the company as creating a satisfying audience experience.

So far, this approach has been successful. Since its formation in 1997, Propeller has developed both popular and critical appeal, establishing itself as one of the most prominent Shakespeare companies in the United Kingdom. Its many awards include

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Billington, “Men in tights pair sublime ambivalence with coarse cruelty,” *The Guardian*, 18 January 2007, 36.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Victoria A. Rocamora, “Theatrical Rhythm and Blues: A Candid Interview with ‘Henry V’ Director Edward Hall,” *The Mexico City Times*, 16 October 1998, 2.

Theatre Awards UK's 2011 award for Best Touring Production for *Richard III/The Comedy of Errors* and a 2007 special citation Obie award for *The Taming of the Shrew*.<sup>5</sup> It has also established an international reputation, visiting such countries as Australia, China, and Germany. In the United States of America, the company has made repeated appearances at New York's influential Brooklyn Academy of Music, as well as forming a partnership with the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and touring to cities such as Berkeley, Boston, and Washington, D. C. In 2011, the company was awarded status as an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organization, which guaranteed Propeller funding until 2014 and recognized the company's importance within the British theatrical landscape.

Despite its critical and commercial success, there exists little scholarship on the company. The majority of written work referencing Propeller focuses on the productions as finished products, most notably in the form of academic reviews in such journals as *Shakespeare*, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, and *Shakespeare Survey*'s annual Year in Performance overviews.<sup>6</sup> Occasionally, a specific production will make a cameo within a study of some broad aspect of Shakespeare and/or performance. Abigail Rokison uses the 2007 *Twelfth Night* to contrast two approaches to performance authenticity in her article "Authenticity in the 21st Century: Propeller and Shakespeare's Globe," while Propeller's *The Taming of the Shrew* appears in Stephen Purcell's *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* as well as his *Shakespeare and the*

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<sup>5</sup> "Company History," Propeller website, <http://propeller.org.uk/about/company-history>, accessed 7 July 2015.

<sup>6</sup> A representative selection of these reviews includes Michael Dobson, "Shakespeare Performances in England, 2002," *Shakespeare Survey* 56 (2003), 279; Jane Collins, "*The Winter's Tale*," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 24, no. 2 (2006): 116 - 120; Michael Dobson, "Shakespeare Performances in England, 2005," *Shakespeare Survey* 59 (2006), 316-318; Colm MacCrossan, "Review of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (directed by Edward Hall for Propeller) at the Watermill Theatre, Newbury, April 2009," *Shakespeare* 5, no. 4 (2009): 444-447; Peter Kirwan, "Review of Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *The Comedy of Errors* (directed by Edward Hall for Propeller Theatre), the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry, 8-9 February 2011," *Shakespeare* 8, no. 1 (2012) 77-82; Carol Chillington Rutter, "Shakespeare Performance in England (and Wales) 2012," *Shakespeare Survey* 66 (2013), 361-363; Emma Poltrack, "*The Comedy of Errors/A Midsummer Night's Dream*," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 32, no. 3 (2014): 513-519;

*Audience in Practice*.<sup>7</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter's *Shakespeare and Child's Play: Performing Lost Boys on Stage and Screen* uses a Propeller production still from 2005's *The Winter's Tale* for its cover, but the production itself is one of many used to explore the topic of children in Shakespeare's plays and in performance.<sup>8</sup> To date, Patricia Tatspuagh's "Propeller's Staging of *Rose Rage*" and Rutter's "Making the Work of Play," a conversation with Propeller's designer, Michael Pavelka, remain the only sustained pieces of writing that explore Propeller in its own right rather than as evidence in an exploration of a larger subject.<sup>9</sup> All of these works are valuable and are referred to extensively in this project, but none provides a comprehensive examination of how Propeller's quirks of creation solidified to form a successful ensemble company with a distinct approach to Shakespearean performance.

To fully investigate Propeller's history and working practices, this project combines a historical record of the company's formation and evolution with an analysis of Propeller in performance, demonstrating the link between the practical and artistic considerations that impact Shakespearean production. This approach deviates from the majority of the literature on theatre companies, which primarily fall into one of three categories: historical, promotional, or personal. In historical accounts, the organizational and administrative structure is prioritized over the performance output. Artistic choices are discussed broadly, often in conjunction with major trends in the production history and shifts in leadership, but without taking time to explore how the two are interlinked. A prominent example in this category is Sally

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<sup>7</sup> Abigail Rokison, "Authenticity in the twenty-first century: Propeller and Shakespeare's Globe," in *Shakespeare in Stages: New Theatre Histories*, eds. Christine Dymkowski and Christie Carson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 71-90; Stephen Purcell, *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), 93-94; Stephen Purcell, *Shakespeare and Audience in Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), 85-89, 157-172.

<sup>8</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play: Performing Lost Boys on Stage and Screen* (London: Routledge, 2007), 100-102.

<sup>9</sup> Patricia Tatspuagh, "Propeller's Staging of *Rose Rage*," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 17 (2005), 239-254; Michael Pavelka, "Making the Work of Play," in conversation with Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare Survey* 66 (2013), 129-144.

Beauman's *Royal Shakespeare Company: A History in Ten Decades*. Beauman's book is invaluable for understanding how external pressures shaped a company and for examining the evolution of the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) over time, but its scope is too broad to adequately analyze the effect the company's history has had on its approach to Shakespearean performance.<sup>10</sup>

If historical accounts of theatre companies tend to overlook the onstage work, then promotional writings skew towards the opposite end of the spectrum.

Promotional literature can be pictorial or literary and usually marks an event, production, or anniversary for marketing purposes. These publications often include promotional stills or "behind the scenes" anecdotes to entice the buyer, which makes them valuable aids to forming a picture of the company in rehearsal. However, they are almost always produced by the company in question. As a result, they are highly subjective and serve to celebrate rather than critically analyze the company's history and organization. To date, Simon Reade's *Cheek by Jowl: Ten Years of Celebration* remains the only book dedicated to this influential company, yet Reade offers very little analysis, preferring to mark each production through a combination of glowing reviews and interview extracts.<sup>11</sup> The RSC routinely publishes companion pieces to significant events in the company's history, such as *The Complete Works Yearbook*, *The Histories* program, and *Transformation: Shakespeare's New Theatre*, which tells the story of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre's refurbishment between 2007 and 2010, but their status as in-house publications means they can hardly be considered impartial accounts of the company's work.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Sally Beauman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company: A History in Ten Decades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

<sup>11</sup> Simon Reade, *Cheek by Jowl: Ten Years of Celebration* (Bath: Absolute Classic, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> *The Complete Works Yearbook* (Stratford-upon-Avon, Royal Shakespeare Company, 2007); *The Histories* program (Stratford-upon-Avon: Royal Shakespeare Company, 2007); David Ward, *Transformations: Shakespeare's New Theatre* (Stratford-upon-Avon: RSC Enterprise, 2011).



Promotional material sometimes takes the form of personal narration, the third category of performance material that is widely available. Personal performance accounts are written by someone inside the company and recall his or her time and experience there, often related to a specific production. W. B. Worthen describes actor diaries — specifically entries in Russell Jackson’s *Players of Shakespeare* series — as “[w]ritten after the fact, sometimes dictated, occasionally written to order” and concerned with “how actors conceptualize their work.”<sup>13</sup> These accounts focus on the individual journey rather than collective approach. Personal accounts, like promotional materials, are highly subjective, and they can be either critical or laudatory, depending on the author’s relationship with the company. *Peter Hall’s Diaries* offer insight into the politics of running a major theatre (in this case, the National Theatre) but lacks outside perspective on the work produced during the time period covered. Meanwhile, actor diaries such as Antony Sher’s *Year of the King*, Nick Asbury’s *Exit Pursued by a Badger*, and Keith Osborn’s *Something Written in the State of Denmark* offer insight into the rehearsal process but are similarly limited in their ability to contextualize the chronicled production within the company’s history.

This is not to say the field is completely devoid of work detailing the complicated interplay between process and production, administration and artistry. Alycia Smith-Howard’s *Studio Shakespeare: The Royal Shakespeare Company at The Other Place* provides not only a detailed account of the type of Shakespeare productions performed at the RSC’s small studio theatre between 1973 and 1989, but also explores how these productions reflected the political and artistic aims of Mary Ann “Buzz” Goodbody and their interactions with the organization as a whole.<sup>14</sup> However,

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<sup>13</sup> W. B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 97.

<sup>14</sup> Alycia Smith-Howard, *Studio Shakespeare: The Royal Shakespeare Company at The Other Place* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006).

Smith-Howard's book reveals another trend in performance studies: the preoccupation with the RSC and the National Theatre (NT). The prevalence of these two companies risks marginalizing the work of companies such as Cheek by Jowl, Northern Broadsides, English Shakespeare Company, and the Renaissance Stage Company, which were formed in the 1980s and 1990s as a reaction to institutionalized Shakespeare.

Many of these smaller companies, Propeller included, categorize themselves as "ensembles," further distancing themselves from England's institutional theatrical bodies. While large companies with complicated infrastructures such as the RSC and NT struggle to find a way to apply ensemble methodology to their practices, Propeller has established itself as a leading Shakespeare ensemble, but has done so without a unifying mission statement. The company has coalesced around broad ideas of "story," "play," and "ensemble" as defined by the personal interests of Hall and encouraged by the adaptable, collaborative designs of Michael Pavelka. In rehearsal, actors are consistently encouraged to contribute to the production as a whole, be it through their role as part of an onstage choric presence, the composition and performance of music, or open discussions of the text and its performance potential. In performance, Propeller consistently draws attention to its own theatricality, aligning it with the traditions of "popular" theatre as defined by Purcell that pit perceptions of Shakespeare's plays as indecipherable "high" culture against their origins as "low" populist entertainment.<sup>15</sup> It is also a commercial venture, subject to financial pressures and the ability to market its work to the regional and international theatres to which it tours, and heavily indebted to the influence of its original producing partner, the Watermill Theatre.

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<sup>15</sup> Purcell, *Popular Shakespeare*, 13.

The intersection between artistic aims and practical pressures is the subject of this thesis, which covers the period from Propeller's formation in 1997 to its most recent tour of new stagings, 2011/2's *Henry V / The Winter's Tale*. The focus of this project is to analyze the symbiotic relationship between the company's organizational structure and its full-length Shakespeare productions. As a result of this focus, Propeller's recent educational work and revivals are only tangentially explored in the conclusion, branching as they do from Propeller's main body of work.

For my analysis of Propeller's history and working practices, I have turned to the company itself, piecing together a picture of Propeller's evolution and rehearsal practices through interviews given by company members (both to members of the press and as released through the company as promotional material) and their writings, which range from behind-the-scenes included in Propeller's published play scripts to instructional manuals such as Michael Pavelka's *So You Want to be a Theatre Designer*.<sup>16</sup> These materials were supplemented by a number of personal interviews and observations from Propeller's 2015 symposium *Propelling Edward III: Research in Action*. Due to the subjective nature of interviews, wherever possible I have attempted to corroborate statements by consulting additional sources, comparing the described practices to other companies,' or by returning to the productions themselves to judge whether the intended effect was achieved. However, the process of corroboration through performance analysis offers its own set of challenges as theatre is a transient art form. No production moment, however seemingly stable, can be taken as a constant, nor can any audience be assumed to be uniform in its response to a theatrical production. The production moments described in this project are largely based on my own personal observations taken across multiple viewings of each

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Pavelka, *So You Want to be a Theatre Designer?* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2015).

Propeller production since 2007, the factual accuracy of which I confirmed through reference to archival footage, prompt books, rehearsal and production photographs, rehearsal reports, theatre programs, and published play texts. For productions that pre-date 2007, such as chapter 2's analysis of 2001's *Rose Rage*, these secondary sources became the tools with which I re-constructed the productions. To counter-act the degree to which my personal response informs my reading of these performance moments, I have supplemented my analysis with reviews from a variety of sources including local and national newspapers, academic journals, and theatre blogs so as to examine the range of possible responses. In keeping with this project's focus on the plays in production, I have reproduced Shakespearean quotations as much as possible according to their appearance in Propeller's published play texts.

I have structured this thesis roughly according to the production process, concentrating on the elements that conceptualize and execute the main artistic components of a Propeller performance. I identified these components as director Edward Hall, designer Michael Pavelka, the acting company, and the "finished" performances. This structure allows the project to visualize how Propeller produces Shakespeare along a roughly chronological timescale, corresponding with four stages of production as defined by Robert Cohen: preparation, planning, production, and presenting.<sup>17</sup> It also allows each chapter to build upon the ideas previously explored, as each stage of the production process is contingent on its predecessor. By using specific Propeller productions to investigate each phase of this process, I illustrate how Propeller has used its practical organization to create a distinctive performance aesthetic and how that aesthetic aids in connecting modern audiences to Shakespeare's text through exposing the theatrical process. Companies such as the

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<sup>17</sup> Robert Cohen, *Working Together in Theatre: Collaboration and Leadership* (London: Palgrave, 2011), xi.

RSC, Shakespeare's Globe, and Kneehigh provide counterpoints to demonstrate Propeller's specific contributions to Shakespearean performance.

The first chapter addresses Edward Hall, Propeller's artistic director. Hall's work is often presented as a continuation of his father, Peter Hall's, work with Shakespeare, an association which Hall continuously pushed against in his early career.<sup>18</sup> While this project highlights the differences rather than similarities between Edward and Peter Hall, the prominence of the RSC in British theatre is undeniable, and no study of a Shakespearean company would be complete without addressing how it either embraces or rejects the RSC's approach to producing Shakespeare's plays. This chapter establishes some of the commonalities between Peter and Edward Hall's stated goals before demonstrating how the pursuit of these goals led to contrasting organizational structures and directorial styles. The chapter then examines Edward Hall's background, focusing on the way in which Edward Hall's personal opinions regarding theatre and Shakespeare led to Propeller's evolution from a one-off production into an established "all-male Shakespeare company which seeks to find a *more* engaging way of expressing Shakespeare and to *more* completely explore the relationship between text and performance" (emphasis mine).<sup>19</sup> The use of "more" positions Propeller as redressing the failure of other Shakespeare companies — a group which cannot help but include the RSC — to fully realize the plays' potential to engage audiences. Further contrasts between Edward and Peter Hall's directorial approaches become evident through a comparison of Propeller's *Rose Rage* and the RSC's *Wars of the Roses*, which locates Edward Hall's view of Shakespeare on the spectrum of "authentic" Shakespeare, aligning him with directors who find

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<sup>18</sup> To differentiate between the two men within this thesis, "Hall" always refers to Edward Hall whereas Peter Hall is identified by his full name.

<sup>19</sup> "About Propeller," Propeller Website, <http://propeller.org.uk/about>, accessed 20 April 2013.

authenticity in the spirit of the plays and their ability to connect with audiences as popular entertainment.

Chapter two focuses on Michael Pavelka, Propeller's scenic and costume designer, specifically Pavelka's work with Hall in creating the conceptual framework for a production and his process in creating the scenic and costume designs for the company. Like many close partnerships, Pavelka and Hall have a long-standing collaborative working relationship that extends beyond their work with Propeller. The first section of this chapter addresses Pavelka's background and schooling, which impacted the development of his design philosophy and its application to his work with Propeller. While Hall's relationship was shown in the first chapter to be a departure from his father's work, this first section examines Pavelka's work as a continuation of ideas first put forth by his predecessors, especially Richard Negri. After examining Pavelka's views on the role of design, this chapter goes on to examine his scenic and costume design for Propeller's 2010/1 tour of *Richard III* and *The Comedy of Errors*. Though Pavelka comes to each production with a clear concept for its visual identity, his designs include a flexibility that preserves the actors' agency in creating performance. Moreover, Pavelka's use of a proto-Elizabethan template — a flexible playing space populated by bodies in eclectic costumes — frames Propeller's productions as plays, encouraging the active imaginative contribution of the spectators.

The next chapter examines the acting company's composition and rehearsal practices. Propeller's highly collaborative rehearsal process and unique first-refusal casting system has led to an extraordinarily tight-knit group of actors who have worked together for years. How Propeller's structure balances the needs of the individual and his contributions to the collective is a central concern of this chapter,

which illustrates how this balance characterizes Propeller's identity as an ensemble company. The actors' relationships with each other and with Hall result in shifting leadership roles, from volunteering to compose music to self-regulation regarding the delivery of Shakespeare's text in performance. Such opportunities allow for rehearsal to become its own training program, furthering the skills of the actors despite the lack of any professed desire by Hall to devise new methods of performance. This chapter also continues to build on the idea of frameworks found in the previous two chapters, examining how Propeller's productions benefit through the company's use of flexible structuring that provides support to the performers as well as flexibility to continuously explore methods of communicating Shakespeare's texts.

The fourth and final chapter offers two cases studies of the company in performance, *The Taming of the Shrew* (2006) and *The Merchant of Venice* (2008). These plays demonstrate how Propeller's use of framing devices has the potential to reconstitute Shakespeare's texts as investigations of contemporary masculinity. Employing this perspective, I illustrate how *The Taming of the Shrew* is the result of one man's overcompensation for his failure to complete a rite of passage (matrimony); and *The Merchant of Venice's* use of the prison setting reframes the story to make it not only about religious differences, but about the escalating use of violence to establish supremacy in an all-male environment. The use of such framing devices simultaneously justifies the adherence to Propeller's single-sex casting policy as it reflects issues relevant to modern audiences, and shows the potential for the performance components to provide new perspectives on Shakespeare's texts.

At the time of writing, Propeller finds itself facing an uncertain future; the result of funding cuts and increasing external pressures. Substantial changes in the company's producing profile in the past few years indicate a shift for the company

from a producer of new, full-length Shakespeare production to an educational company working with young audiences. Should this transformation come to pass, Shakespearean performance will have lost one of its most innovative interpreters. By exploring the company's history thus far, both offstage and on, this project seeks to create a record of a unique theatre company and its contribution to Shakespearean performance.



## Chapter 1: Ed Hall and Shakespeare's Text

### Edward Hall, Director at play

About half an hour before the interval, the second part of Propeller's adaptation of the *Henry VI* plays — titled *Rose Rage* — was interrupted by a rare instance of stillness. Moments before, a cacophony of sound signaled the beginning of the Battle of Towton, and after an exchange of threats and blows, Richard (Richard Clothier), Clifford (Matt Flynn) and Warwick (Tony Bell) all exited the stage, presumably to commit further atrocities in the implied world beyond the wings. In their wake, King Henry VI (Jonathan McGuinness) entered the playing space and sat down on the edge of the stage, his small frame hesitantly breaking the fourth wall as he began to ruminate on the attractions of simple living. McGuinness' physical stillness was highlighted by two spotlights. The precedent set by the use of Gospel hymns, Gregorian chants, and the sounds of knives sharpening, which had haunted the production until this point, was broken by the silence that underscored McGuinness' monologue. He remained the only figure onstage until the conclusion of his speech, at which point an alarum sounded and two men, each carrying a lifeless body, entered from opposite sides of the stage. They are identified by Edward Hall and Roger Warren's stage directions as "a SON that has killed his father" and "a FATHER that has killed his son" — Shakespeare's tragic casualties that exemplify the brutalities of civil war.<sup>1</sup> As King Henry VI watched, each survivor first ransacked the body he carried for gold before having the sickening realization he has killed his own kin.

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Complete Works*, these stage directions read: "Enter [at one door] a Soldier with a dead man in his arms." and "Enter [at another door] another Soldier with a dead man [in his arms]." *3H6*, II.v.54.2; II.v.88.4 The 1595 quarto of the play has the stage directions as "Enter a souldier with a dead man in his armes" and "Enter an other souldier with a dead man." William Shakespeare, *The true tragedie of Richard Duke of York* (London: 1595), Bodleian Library, STC / 1151:17, page sig. C2v.

In Hall and Warren's play script, the lines assigned to the living father and son were broken up and alternated, creating a clear juxtaposition between each pair as well as an almost cinematic split-screen effect onstage, an example of Propeller's production style adapting Shakespeare's texts to create a striking production moment.

Compare:

SOLDIER:

Ill blows the wind that profits nobody.  
This man, whom hand to hand I slew in fight,  
May be possessed with some store of crowns;  
And I, that haply take from him now,  
May yet ere night yield both my life and them  
To some man else, as this man doth me.  
Who's this? O God! It is my father's face  
Whom in this conflict I, unawares, have killed.  
O, heavy time, begetting such events!  
From London by the King I was pressed forth;  
My father, being the Earl of Warwick's man,  
Came on the part of York, pressed by his  
master;  
And I, who at my hands received my life,  
Have by my hands of life bereaved him.  
Pardon me, God, I knew not what I did;  
And pardon, father, for I knew not thee.  
My tears shall wipe away these bloody marks,  
And no more words till they have flowed their  
fill.

KING HENRY:

O piteous spectacle! O bloody times!  
Whiles lions roar and battle for their dens,  
Poor harmless lambs abide their enmity.  
Weep, wretched man, I'll aid thee tear for tear;  
And let our hearts, and eyes, like civil war,  
Be blind with tears, and break, overcharged  
with grief.

SECOND SOLDIER:

Though that so stoutly hath resisted me,  
Give me thy gold, if thou hast any gold—

SON: This man, whom hand to hand I slew in  
fight,  
May be possessed with some store of crowns.

FATHER: Give me thy gold, if thou hast any  
gold,  
For I have bought it with an hundred blows.  
But let me see: is this our foeman's face?

SON: Who's this? O God! It is my father's  
face.

FATHER: Ah no, no, no, it is mine only son!  
Ah boy, if any life be left in thee,  
Throw up thine eye!

SON: O heavy times, begetting such events?

FATHER: O pity, God, this miserable age!

SON: From London by the King was I pressed  
forth;  
My father being the Earl of Warwick's man,  
Came on the part of York, pressed by his  
master;  
And I, who at his hands received my life,  
Have by my hands of life bereaved him.

FATHER: What stratagems, how fell, how  
butcherly,  
Erroneous, mutinous, and unnatural,  
This deadly quarrel daily doth beget!  
O boy, thy father gave thee life too soon,  
And hath bereft thee of thy life too late!

SON: Pardon me, God, I know now what I did;  
And pardon father, for I knew not thee.  
My tears shall wipe away these bloody marks,  
And no more words till they have flowed their  
fill.

KING HENRY: O piteous spectacle! O bloody  
times!

In the original text, these speeches follow similar trajectories: speculation regarding the prospect of gold, recognition of the dead soldier, reflection on the circumstances that led to the moment, and lamentation. Each one is followed by King Henry's reaction, which provides an anticlimax to the emotional arc. In *Rose Rage*, the parallel structures of the speeches are emphasized by alternating between the two speakers, creating a call and response rhythm that anticipates the transition to shorter, parallel lines that occurs in both texts as the scene progresses.

More than simply an illustration of textual emendation, the moment also presents a striking parallel for another aspect of Propeller's work: the sometimes contentious relationship between director Edward Hall and the legacy of his father, Peter. Edward Hall's desire for independence is understandable. Since graduating Mountview Academy of Dramatic Arts in the 1980s, Hall has built up an impressive résumé as a director. He has directed everything from Shakespeare to Sondheim for the stage, as well as working in other media such as television, film, radio, and video games. His roles as associate director of the National Theatre (NT), Old Vic, and Watermill Theatre, and artistic director of Hampstead Theatre, are testaments to his success and influence within the English theatrical landscape. In 1999, Hall won Barclays Theatre Award for Best Director with Propeller's *Twelfth Night*, and since then his portfolio has expanded to include Obie, Jeff, Drama Desk and Olivier awards and nominations.<sup>2</sup> Yet, despite Hall's achievements and accolades, the press has a stubborn tendency to define Hall not by his accomplishments but by his lineage. Some version of the phrase "Edward Hall, son of Sir Peter" appears in almost every article about him, interview with him, or review of his work, subtly coloring Hall's career as

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<sup>2</sup> "Company History," Propeller website, <http://propeller.org.uk/about/company-history>, accessed 7 July 2015; "Biographies," Propeller website, <http://propeller.org.uk/about/biographies>, accessed 7 July 2015.

inheritor of his father's pioneering efforts.<sup>3</sup> Though this thesis has no interest in perpetuating a view of Hall's work as a mere continuation of his father's, it is nonetheless difficult to reject entirely the natural position of the observer on the molehill, as there are striking similarities to be made between the two directors' philosophical views towards theatre practice. For example, Peter Hall's work with the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) to move towards an ensemble system and his strict adherence to the rules of verse structure both find themselves echoed in Edward Hall's work with Propeller, and is heavily cited within this project's exploration of Propeller's acting company. However, the representation of Hall as taking over the family business glosses over the ways in which his directorial approach differs from, and even directly contradicts, his father's beliefs regarding Shakespeare in performance.

These differences are based around how each interprets the challenge to connect Shakespeare with modern audiences and how best to use the text in performance. Peter Hall, writing in 1963, defined the goal of his newly created RSC: "All we can do, by diligent scholarship and hard work, is to try and express Shakespeare's intentions in terms that modern audiences can understand."<sup>4</sup> In citing "diligent scholarship" as one of the necessary factors in successful Shakespeare production, Peter Hall points to a cerebral approach to performance, which contributed to the "coolly rational, text-centered and Cambridge-influenced style for

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<sup>3</sup> The press surrounding Edward Hall's appointment as artistic director of the Hampstead Theatre is indicative of this tendency. "Edward Hall appointed new artistic director of Hampstead Theatre," *The Telegraph*, 14 January 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-news/6987990/Edward-Hall-appointed-new-artistic-director-of-Hampstead-Theatre.html>, accessed 7 July 2015; Caroline McGinn, "Edward Hall: Interview," *TimeOut London*, 13 January 2011, <http://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/edward-hall-interview>, accessed 7 July 2015; Mark Shenton, "Edward Hall Appointed New Artistic Director of London's Hampstead Theatre," *Playbill*, 13 January 2010, <http://www.playbill.com/news/article/edward-hall-appointed-new-artistic-director-of-londons-hampstead-theatre-164911>, accessed 7 July 2015; Alistair Smith, "Can Edward Hall breathe new life into Hampstead Theatre?," *The Guardian*, 13 January 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2010/jan/13/edward-hall-hampstead-theatre>, accessed 7 July 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Hall, "Shakespeare and the Modern Director," in *Royal Shakespeare Theatre Company 1960-1963*, ed. John Goodwin (London: Max Reinhardt, Ltd., 1964), 41.

which the RSC under [Peter] Hall would become known.”<sup>5</sup> For Peter Hall, the conditions of performance were set down in Shakespeare’s verse structure, and he defined the RSC as “the product of a group of actors all speaking the text in the same way and a group of directors who agreed that they all knew what to look for in the verse.”<sup>6</sup> His version of ensemble came not from collaboration and actor investment but from acceptance of a preordained set of performance conventions based upon the text, ones that would reveal Shakespeare’s true “intentions.” In contrast, Edward Hall bases his pursuit of Shakespeare not in the speaking but in the playing, viewing Shakespeare as a populist playwright writing for an audience seeking entertainment above all things. For Hall, this means investing in the performative potential of the words through exploring what he terms “traditional methods” concentrating on the actor’s physicality and its potential to inspire an audience’s imagination.<sup>7</sup> While the phrase “traditional methods” is increasingly invoked to explain Propeller’s continued use of an all-male cast, it is also the philosophy that drives a number of other performance signatures, such as actors serving as musicians and stagehands, the preference for a minimal and flexible scenic design, a group of actors whose number and continuity are reminiscent of Elizabethan acting companies, and a strong commitment to encouraging actor and audience interaction.<sup>8</sup> There is therefore a contrast between Peter Hall, who views authenticity as contingent on a certain textual approach, and Hall, who locates it in reestablishing a version of Elizabethan performance conditions. This chapter will explore the conditions that formed Hall’s

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Cornford, “The English Theatre Studios of Michael Chekov and Michel Saint-Denis, 1935-1965” (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2012), 287.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Hall, *Shakespeare’s Advice to the Players* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2003), 203.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Croall, “A Different Kind of Resonance,” *Twelfth Night/Taming of the Shrew* program, Propeller (London: Old Vic Theatre, 2007), np.

<sup>8</sup> Abigail Rokison, “Authenticity in the twenty-first century: Propeller and Shakespeare’s Globe,” in *Shakespeare in Stages: New Theatre Histories*, eds. Christine Dymkowski and Christie Carson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 73; Patricia Tatspaugh, “Propeller’s Staging of *Rose Rage*,” *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 17 (2005): 239.

views of theatre and how these influences shaped the version of “traditional methods” that Hall applies to Propeller’s treatment of Shakespeare.

The notion of ensemble in the twenty-first century is constantly being redefined by the companies who use the term to describe their working practices and organizational structures. Chapter three will examine the concept of ensemble theatre more closely as it applies to the acting company and therefore this chapter will narrow its focus to how Propeller’s production process is derived from Hall’s leadership as the ensemble’s founder and director. As director for all Propeller shows, Hall sets the tone for the company and is Propeller’s guiding voice, choosing the plays for production and developing their conceptual framework alongside Propeller’s designer, Michael Pavelka. An early article described Hall’s work with *Henry V* as an effort to “reinterpret Shakespeare for a modern audience without abandoning traditional themes, developing a relationship between the audience and the performer as close as in the 16th century.”<sup>9</sup> Because Hall’s views are grounded in his own personal experiences and opinions of what theatre is and can be, any account of his work must first start from his biography. It then becomes possible to analyze how Hall’s personal history became intertwined with Propeller’s creation and evolution, particularly Hall’s interest in and interpretations of what he sees as traditional methods of Shakespearean performance. Though Hall had, with the company, been experimenting with such performance methods since his production of *Henry V* in 1997, *Rose Rage*, Propeller’s 2001 adaptation of the *Henry VI* trilogy, solidified these experiments into performance signatures for the company. *Rose Rage*, then, will feature strongly in my exploration of Hall’s directorial style and the trademarks of Propeller in production.

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<sup>9</sup> Mexico City Times Staff, “Fighting Here and Now,” *Mexico City Times*, 16 October 1998, 3.

Hall was born in 1966, and grew up in the company of his sister, Lucy, and mother, Jacqueline Taylor. A boarder at Bedales, Hall attended a “liberal, open-minded, artistically centered” school that encouraged students to pursue music, writing, and drama.<sup>10</sup> Current headmaster Keith Budge describes the attitude at Bedales School:

We maintain high standards of behaviour, which we believe arise best from self-discipline and from caring about others. Although our students are naturally ambitious and competitive, the school places particular emphasis on collaboration. [...] Personal relationships here evince remarkable trust and rapport. Mutual respect is earned, not exacted by rank.<sup>11</sup>

Such an environment is comparable to the one Hall would strive to create with Propeller, where collaboration is encouraged to create a theatrical ensemble, a place in which the contributions of each member are recognized and valued regardless of that person’s role in a production.<sup>12</sup> Though he downplays his father’s presence during his childhood (“Look, my father left home when I was 13. He was brilliant when he was there, but for a lot of my childhood he was away working.”), Hall recognizes theatre was a consistent and informative force in his life from an early age.<sup>13</sup> Such early exposure to theatre meant that Hall grew up recognizing theatre’s creative and emotional force rather than its potential as a political tool or rallying cry:

I suppose I went to the theatre more than most people when I was younger, but I always remember that even then it seemed like a natural extension to playing. [...] It was just that grown-ups did it. Now I’m a father myself I can see all the role-playing that goes on with kids, and that theatre is just a more formal way of doing it. But seeing a lot of

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<sup>10</sup> Lesley Finlay, “Big Interview: Edward Hall,” *Ink Pellet*, September 2010, <http://www.inkpellet.co.uk/2010/09/big-interview-edward-hall/>, accessed 14 March 2013; Edward Hall, “An Unconventional Education,” *School House*, <http://schoolhousemagazine.co.uk/schools/school-days/edward-hall-remembers-bedales>, accessed 16 March 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Keith Budge, Bedales School, <http://www.bedales.org.uk/bedales>, accessed 19 April 2013.

<sup>12</sup> E. Hall, “An Unconventional Education.”

<sup>13</sup> Aleks Sierz, “Don’t mention his father’s Wars of the Roses: Edward Hall has his own, bloodier artistic vision,” *The Sunday Times*, 6 June 2002, 17.

theatre when I was young really exposed me to the scarier sides of life. You learn about everything from murder to love.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike Barrie Rutter, for example, whose biography charts a relationship with theatre that increasingly reflected Rutter's experience with England's classist North/South divide, Hall's biography shows an interest in theatre for theatre's sake, a view of the medium as a playground in which human experiences and relationships are practiced, dissected, and explored.<sup>15</sup> Propeller's mission, therefore, differs from other companies such as Rutter's Northern Broadsides, intent on breaking the southern accented monopoly on Shakespeare, or The English Shakespeare Company, born when its artistic directors became aggressively "grumpy" with the established bureaucracy of the RSC and NT systems.<sup>16</sup> Hall locates the value of theatre in the act of playing and his directorial approach honors this view by focusing on how the actors play in the rehearsal room and how audiences are subsequently made to feel included in the practice.

Writing in 2002, Hall presented Propeller's work as a creative venture seeking to answer the question, "Why produce Shakespeare?"

Of course he is a genius and possibly the greatest writer who ever lived, but is he still relevant to us in a world that demands that art reflects and debates the many different cultures that affect our society today? Unless we shake the Bard down and make him speak in the present tense, then we perpetuate the kind of "museum Shakespeare" that we have far too much of already.<sup>17</sup>

Hall then goes on to describe a number of tour experiences where the thematic content of Propeller's productions coincided with the political environment in which

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<sup>14</sup> Edward Hall, quoted in "On a wing and a prayer," *The Herald Scotland*, 22 February 2011, <http://www.heraldsotland.com/arts-ents/stage-visual-arts/on-a-wing-and-a-prayer-1.1086529>, accessed 20 April 2013.

<sup>15</sup> Christian M. Billing, "Barrie Rutter" in *The Routledge Companion to Director's Shakespeare*, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Routledge, 2008), 390-392; Carol Chillington Rutter, "Rough Magic: Northern Broadsides at Work and Play," *Shakespeare Survey* 56 (2003): 236-255.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Michael Bogdanov and Michael Pennington, *The English Shakespeare Company: The Story of 'The Wars of the Roses' 1986-1989* (London: Nick Hearn Books, 1990), xi-xiv.

<sup>17</sup> Edward Hall, "Guns and roses," *The Guardian*, 17 June 2002, 15.



they were being performed: the soldiers of *Henry V* co-opted as Zapatista supporters, performances of the same cancelled due to threat of riot in Bangladesh, and *The Comedy of Errors* reflecting recent class upheaval in Jakarta.<sup>18</sup> Hall concludes that Propeller's identity as a "young company articulating the plays in a contemporary fashion" was a contributing factor to the productions' strong receptions.<sup>19</sup> Though Hall makes a compelling case for Shakespeare's ability to reflect contemporary issues, the examples he references from Propeller's history were coincidental. Hall's direction of Propeller is centered on how he views the state of Shakespeare in performance; the instances of political reflection he describes are the result of audiences identifying with situations onstage and then finding parallels with their own experience rather than Hall intentionally using Propeller productions to comment on specific events. The political relevance of Propeller productions comes from Hall's ability to frame stories around abstract ideas — cruelty, power, responsibility — which audiences then connect to their own experience. *Rose Rage* provides a striking example. Recast with American actors for a staging at the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre in 2003, the production led Francesca T. Royster to view Hall's staging as an in-depth examination of "the specific historical marking of bodies white and non-white" in the wake of September 11 and Abu Ghraib.<sup>20</sup> Royster based this assessment on the casting of non-white actors Bruce Young and Carman Lacivita as the Duke of York and King Henry VI, respectively. According to Royster, the casting was used to "ask us to think more consciously [...] about the transformation of raced bodies into characters, characters into flesh, and flesh into symbol."<sup>21</sup> However, Royster's interpretation is more

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Francesca T. Royster, "The Chicago Theater's *Rose Rage*: Whiteness, Terror and the Fleshwork of Theatre in a Post-Colorblind Age," in *Colorblind Shakespeare: new perspectives on race and performance*, ed. Ayanna Thompson (New York: Routledge, 2006), 235.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 230.

indicative of her identity as an African-American female spectator than Hall's conceptual goals, as *Rose Rage* had originally premiered on February 3, 2001 with an almost completely white cast.<sup>22</sup>

Hall's directorial approach favors story-telling over overt political statements. After briefly contemplating a career as a cricketer, Hall enrolled at Leeds University to pursue a degree in History and the Philosophy of Science, but dropped out after a year and enrolled at Mountview.<sup>23</sup> A self-proclaimed "terrible actor," he switched his focus from performing to directing and formed a small company that staged a number of productions for the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.<sup>24</sup> This makeshift company relied on a shoestring budget and a "gang mentality" which placed director and actor on equal footing.<sup>25</sup> Though his father's name would be burdensome to Hall in later years, a look at these early days shows traces of how it served as a useful introduction. Peter Hall was one of the Chichester Festival's directors in 1990, the year before Edward Hall signed on as an assistant, and one of Hall's first experiences with a West End production was as assistant director for The Peter Hall Company's 1993 production of *Lysistrata* at the Old Vic.<sup>26</sup> Hall showed his potential as a director in his own right in 1992 with a limited engagement production of *Cain* at the Minerva Theatre. *Cain*, a rarely performed play by Lord Byron detailing mankind's first murder, presented "knotty speeches of compressed theology" which Hall's production was able to illuminate, giving a hint of what he would bring to Shakespeare's texts.<sup>27</sup> Beyond the clarity of story-telling, Hall's direction drew "exceptional" performances from its

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<sup>22</sup> The only exception was actor Emilio Doorgasingh, who is British-Indian.

<sup>23</sup> Finlay; E. Hall, "An Unconventional Education."

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Sierz.

<sup>25</sup> E. Hall, quoted in "On a wing and a prayer."

<sup>26</sup> "Production Archive: Festival Theatre," Chichester Theatre Festival, <http://www.cft.org.uk/production-archive-festival-theatre>, accessed 20 April 2013; Emily Bearn, "Ed and the Gang," *London Evening Standard*, 15 December 2006, 48.

<sup>27</sup> Jeremy Kingston, "Byronic twist to the Bible," *The Times*, 28 September 1992, 3.

leading actors, and Lucifer's entrance was a "*coup de theatre* [...]" illustrating Hall's concern to provide something to look at when Byron is overdoing the adjectives."<sup>28</sup> This review foreshadows a practice of using strong visual statements to elucidate complex textual imagery that would be developed throughout Hall's career, particularly with Propeller where Shakespeare's expository speeches are often physicalized by the company's choric presence.

Hall's proving ground was the Watermill Theatre in Newbury, a tiny 216-seater which would become Propeller's home base for the next decade.<sup>29</sup> At the invitation of artistic director Jill Fraser, under whose direction the theatre's production schedule expanded from a summer festival to year-round season, Hall signed on to direct *Othello* as part of the 1995 season. Two notable productions of the play in the previous decade — Cheek by Jowl's production in 1982 and Trevor Nunn's production for the RSC's Other Place in 1989 — had served to draw out the play's potential as a claustrophobic domestic drama, and the intimacy of the Watermill would have well lent itself to continuing in a similar conceptual vein.<sup>30</sup> Instead, Hall's production was praised for the way in which it honored the play's "sense of largess and monumental movement" and Roy Martin of *The Stage* found it to be "as enthralling a Shakespeare show as any to be found in the land at the moment."<sup>31</sup> The one detractor was Jeremy Kingston of *The Times* who, having seen *Cain*, was hoping for another "powerfully theatrical occasion."<sup>32</sup> Kingston counted it a great disappointment; a relatively straightforward, functional interpretation of a play as rich

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Jeremy Kingston, "Watermill on a wheel of fortune," *The Times*, 11 May 1993, 35.

<sup>30</sup> Simon Reade, *Cheek by Jowl: Ten Years of Celebration* (Bath: Absolute Classics, 1991), 63; Alycia Smith-Howard, *Studio Shakespeare: The Royal Shakespeare Company at The Other Place* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006), 91.

<sup>31</sup> John Peter, "Othello, Watermill Theatre," *The Sunday Times*, 22 October 1995, Shakespeare Institute Library; Roy Martin, "Probably the best in the land," *The Stage*, 2 November 1995, 16.

<sup>32</sup> Jeremy Kingston. "Lost on the Moor," *The Times*, 12 October 1995, 42.

as *Othello*. He cited the production's lack of concern with the physical elements of theatre which left actors "stiff as waxworks" and "motionless for large stretches of time."<sup>33</sup> Hall, Kingston felt, could have done more.

Hall agreed. To Hall, the resulting production had felt "slightly like I'd tried to deliver somehow what was 'expected' of me" and "trapped by naturalism."<sup>34</sup> Today, Propeller defines itself as a company that "seeks to find a more engaging way of expressing Shakespeare and to more completely explore the relationship between text and performance."<sup>35</sup> Propeller's mission statement neglects to identify to what it is comparing itself, but the company's formation as a reaction to Hall's "expected" Shakespeare indicates a general dissatisfaction with contemporary Shakespearean performance. This mission statement ties back to Hall's desire to move away from "museum Shakespeare;" the company's pursuit of "more engaging" productions carries with it an implicit accusation that other approaches contribute to the perception of Shakespeare as a revered yet incomprehensible cultural relic ("What a masterpiece, didn't a understand word of it, but I'm sure it's good for me").<sup>36</sup> That Propeller would achieve this goal through their efforts to "more completely explore the relationship between text and performance" takes the condemnation one step further by linking a failure to engage with audiences with a dependency on text over the physical and visual components of theatre. The emphasis on the presentation of Shakespeare's texts rather than an explicit interest in developing modes of production

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in "Edward Hall on Propeller's *Henry V* and *The Winter's Tale*," WhatsOnStage, 8 January 2015, <http://www.whatsonstage.com/bath-theatre/news/01-2012/edward-hall-on-propellers-henry-v-and-the-winters-5789.html>, accessed 20 April 2013; Alistair Macauley, "We don't pigeonhole actors," *The Financial Times*, 14 January 2007, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/c1cdf20-a253-11db-a187-0000779e2340.html#axzz3f7wQykla>, accessed 7 July 2015. Hall expressed a similar attitude in a 2011 talk back with directing students at the University of Michigan, saying "he tiptoed around the play, trying to do it 'right.'" Quoted in Leslie Stainton, "Tossing Grenades at Shakespeare and other lessons from Propeller director Edward Hall," *UMS Lobby*, 1 April, 2011, <http://umslobby.org/index.php/2011/04/tossing-grenades-at-shakespeare-and-other-lessons-from-propeller-director-ed-hall-5486>, accessed April 20, 2013.

<sup>35</sup> "About Propeller," Propeller Website, <http://propeller.org.uk/about>, accessed 20 April 2013.

<sup>36</sup> E. Hall, "Guns and roses."

positions the company as operating within the context of other companies whose genesis was prompted by artistic rather than political dissatisfaction.<sup>37</sup> Hall seeks to realize his pursuit of “engaging” productions through the “relationship between text and performance” reliant on the actors’ demonstration of that relationship, aligning Propeller with what Kathryn Syssoyeva terms “third wave” collective creation, defined as “post-utopic, dominated by an ethical imperative [...] and an interest in the generative creativity of the actor.”<sup>38</sup>

Hall was developing his new approach to Shakespeare at a time when directors were drawing on a complex history of European theatre inspiring English theatre practitioners to apply new methods to their own work. Examples of directors who have been influenced by experiences abroad include Michael Boyd, who was trained as a director with Malaya Bronnaya in Moscow, and Emma Rice, who refers to her time in Poland as “simply the most influential thing that’s ever happened to me.”<sup>39</sup> Aleks Sieks identifies Declan Donnellan as a “European director,” and his connection to the continent is more than philosophical — since 1999 Cheek by Jowl has had its own satellite company based in Moscow.<sup>40</sup> In contrast, Hall’s push for innovation was not a result of coming into contact with international performance but rather derived from a persistent conviction that he could push Shakespearean performance further than what he had so far experienced in England. Hall explained:

I wanted to find contemporary touchstones that I thought were right for the story I was telling. I wanted to find a few more traditional ways of approaching Shakespeare — to have an all-male cast and take away some of the technological toys.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva, “Introduction: Toward a New History of Collective Creation,” in *Collective Creation in Contemporary Performance*, eds. Kathryn Meteors Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit (London: Palgrave, 2013), 6.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Duška Radosavljević, *The Contemporary Ensemble: Interviews with theatre-makers* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 105.

<sup>40</sup> Aleks Sierz, “Declan Donnellan and Cheek by Jowl,” in *Contemporary European Theatre Directors*, eds. Maria M. Delgado and Dan Rebellato (New York: Routledge, 2010), 149.

<sup>41</sup> Finlay.

Though this statement was made nearly a decade after the original production run of *Henry V* and runs the risk of simply affirming a well-practiced origin story, it is nonetheless indicative of the extent to which Propeller's philosophy reflects Hall's own, personal interests: "*I* wanted," "*I* thought," "*I* was telling" (my emphasis). After *Othello*, Hall chose arguably the most patriotic of Shakespeare's plays, *Henry V*. Hall concentrated specifically on the soldiers who comprised Henry's army by dividing the Chorus amongst the company. Moreover, he cut the characters Macmorris and Jamy and, without his Irish and Scottish companions, Fluellen's purpose within the story was to reflect glory onto Henry rather than comment on United Kingdom unity. Due to these cuts, Bardolph, Pistol and Nym became more prominent within the story, further foregrounding the experience of the common Englishman in a foreign war. The script changes to *Henry V* foreshadowed the adaptation process of the *Henry VI* plays, discussed below, which similarly limited the scope of the action to English concerns, building on Hall's positioning of the plays as English stories.

Artistically, the result of Hall's experimentation was a series of production components that now define Propeller, identified by Propeller actor James Tucker as "a deep commitment to tone and tonal shifts; Shakespearean drama; popular audiences; speed of narrative; knocking down the fourth wall; the acting company as chorus."<sup>42</sup> The former three — looking at the plays as a series of moments, adhering to the Shakespearean canon, and seeking popular audiences — are specifically related to Hall's personal views. It is a defining feature of Hall's direction that, as described by designer Michael Pavelka, "he understands the potential of a dramatic moment, a theatrical moment that has power and that would connect with an audience or just

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<sup>42</sup> James Tucker, email correspondence, 20 January 2014.

other human beings,” and so approaches Shakespeare’s plays not as realistic depictions of everyday interactions, but something more abstracted.<sup>43</sup> Hall views Shakespeare’s plays as “wild fantasies, dreamscapes” that are “as surreal as any modern television series you might watch, where you flash backwards and forwards and people change into vampires and so forth.”<sup>44</sup> The connection Hall makes between Shakespeare’s plays and modern television begins to hint at his view of the plays as popular entertainment, relating back to Tucker’s identification of Propeller as seeking “popular audiences.”

The latter three features Tucker identifies — speed of narrative, eradicating the fourth wall between spectator and performance, and the use of the entire acting company to form a choral presence onstage — begin to move from how Hall perceives the plays themselves to his interpretation of the “traditional methods” of performance he references in his description of his goals for *Henry V*. Again and again, Hall himself explains Propeller’s use of traditional methods in similar terms to Tucker, citing a few key aspects of its productions: the use of an all-male cast, the performance of live music by the actors, the actors as stagehands and the weakening of the barrier between actor and audience.<sup>45</sup> In all of these, the actor is identified as the key component. On the surface, the language and examples used by Hall in describing Propeller’s connection to Elizabethan playhouses would seem to place Propeller alongside, for example, Shakespeare’s Globe’s “original practices” productions that attempt to recreate the historical playing conditions of the original Globe Theatre. The difference lies in how Hall chooses to take such traditional ideas

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<sup>43</sup> Michael Pavelka, personal interview, London, 1 May 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Edward Hall, quoted in Tim Fitzsimons, “The Winter’s Tale: High tragedy and comedy,” *Stuff*, 1 March 2012, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/arts/6501091/The-Winters-Tale-High-tragedy-and-comedy>, accessed 24 April 2014.

<sup>45</sup> Croall; Finlay.

and then apply a contemporary filter to them, “creating a different form of authenticity through a closer replication of audience experience rather than a greater accuracy of reproduction.”<sup>46</sup> This pursuit of authentic experience carries over to other aspects of the production process. Preserving a quick performance pace, for example, is a consideration for the scenic design as well as a key element of the direction given to Propeller’s actors regarding the performance of the text.

The choral presence also contributes to performance pace, as it is the actors who perform scene changes, including those actions as part of the narrative rather than breaks within it. In *Henry V*, this chorus was a company of soldiers, re-enacting the story of Agincourt as a memorial reconstruction of their communal experience in war. In *Rose Rage*, this choral presence was butchers who inhabited an England-as-abattoir and remained onstage throughout, the actors fluidly moving from butcher to noble and back again as the action progressed. The butchers were agents of change that relentlessly drove things forward, their silent presence in scenes foreshadowing or recalling events so that a cyclical feeling was achieved, just as the squaddies of *Henry V* presented a contrast between the heroic exploits of the warrior-king and the demoralizing effects war has on the common soldier. In addition to the practical use of serving the production process, the chorus also adds to the sense of Shakespeare’s plays as “dreamscapes,” as these choral characters are part of and yet still outside the narrative presented onstage. They are physical manifestations of the production environment, reminders of the mechanics of the theatrical process, and a visual subtext which deepens the meaning of the interaction between named characters. Because they blur the lines between realism and theatricality — creating a play-within-a-play while simultaneously framing all performances onstage as a work of

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<sup>46</sup> Rokison, 83.



theatre — their presence aids in establishing a world where the presence of non-naturalistic features — ghosts, curses, mistaken identities, fairies — feels organic. It is through such moments that Hall hopes not only to engage the audience's imagination as part of the theatrical creative process, but to return the production to the actors, increasing their participation through contributions beyond isolated performances as individual characters.

Hall's early work with Propeller was closely connected with the Watermill's location and limited resources. However, Hall was not inheriting a theatrical organization so much as attempting to adapt his own goal for *Henry V* to fit the boundaries set out by the Watermill as a producing partner. The Watermill Theatre was owned and operated by Jill Fraser and her husband James Sargeant, who bought the theatre together in 1981. The Watermill operates as a repertory company and Hall functioned as one of many directors in the 1997-1998 season. Casting decisions regarding *Henry V* were his prerogative, as opposed to having to fit into a larger bureaucratic network, and were limited to the number he would need for a single production. While the size of the Watermill's stage limited the number of actors that could be used in a production, financial constraints were also a factor. In 1997, the Watermill Theatre was facing financial difficulties, a constant struggle for the theatre since its opening in 1968. A three-year grant had been given in 1989, but new pressures were brought in the 1990s when the construction of a bypass highway led to large scale demonstrations. Situated on the outskirts of Newbury and with no reliable public transportation, the theatre depends on loyal audiences since there is no foot traffic on which to capitalize. The theatre's proximity to the protests had led to many regular patrons erroneously assuming the Watermill was not in operation during the

period, leading to a devastating loss of £40,000 in ticket sales in the 1996 season.<sup>47</sup>

There was a sense that *Henry V* could be a make-or-break show for the Watermill, following as it did on the heels of two productions with disappointing houses. Fraser spoke of the production as “a bit of a battle cry for us. Because we’re rehearsing outdoors, the sound of it resonates down the valley, and people are coming in to find out what’s happening.”<sup>48</sup> The use of the outdoor space to generate interest was crucial in the theatre’s marketing plan, which largely relied on word of mouth recommendations, and *Henry V* was produced as part of a season seeking to raise £250,000 to ensure the well-being of the theatre.<sup>49</sup> Writing in a 2001 introduction to the *Rose Rage* script, Hall stressed the importance of the Watermill not only to Propeller, but as an example of the kind of regional theatre that was vital to the health of English theatre:

This company and this text would not exist without the Watermill Theatre. It is vital that the smaller regional producing theatres in this country are financially supported. Grass-roots theatre is the breeding ground for the artists and their work that go on to fill the larger theatres. If we lose many more, our theatre tradition will collapse like a deck of cards, leaving the cultural life of the country substantially poorer.<sup>50</sup>

Here too are echoes of Peter Hall, whose own interest in the health of the regional theatres has been a consistent theme throughout his career.<sup>51</sup> Again, the circumstances surrounding *Henry V* were a combination of Edward Hall’s personal interests and the practical limitations within which he was working. The close relationship with the

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<sup>47</sup> Simon Tait, “Trouble at the Watermill,” *The Times*, 2 May 1997, 37.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Edward Hall, “Rose Rage: The Company,” in *Rose Rage: An adaptation of the Henry VI plays in two parts*, eds. Edward Hall and Roger Warren (London: Oberon Books, Ltd., 2001), 5-6.

<sup>51</sup> In addition to serving as artistic director for the RSC and NT, Peter Hall has worked extensively with the Theatre Royal Bath and the Rose Theatre in Kingston, the latter of which he was named director of in 2003. Andrew Johnson, “Sir Peter Hall: And some have greatness thrust upon them...,” *The Independent*, 21 March 2010, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/sir-peter-hall-and-some-have-greatness-thrust-upon-them-1924629.html>, accessed 29 March 2015.

Watermill evidenced Edward Hall's strong view of theatre as something which should be accessible to all.

Hall's relationship with the Watermill was instrumental in Propeller's formation, and the shows themselves were evidence of a deep sense of theatre's potential as a collective experience. Hall's interest in bringing the audience into the productions is another key element of his interpretation of traditional playing, seeing the audience as an integral part of the original performance conditions. "Most of Shakespeare's plays were written to be performed outside in broad daylight with the audience moving amongst the performers," Hall explained in an early interview promoting *Henry V*.<sup>52</sup> Hall's statement references the connection between audience and performer as paramount to the plays' successes, extrapolating on a known condition of the plays' original performances — the outdoor theatre — to speculate on the level of interplay between its participants. His theatre history is dubious, but describing the plays' origins in this way positions Propeller's early work as a continuation of Elizabethan theatre conditions. Hall has since moved away from language that refers to the accessibility of the plays, feeling the term indicates the plays are too complicated to be enjoyed by modern audiences without "dumbing down," but the interest in reestablishing the plays as popular entertainment is still very much a part of Propeller's production style, as is attempting to connect Propeller's approach to original practice.<sup>53</sup>

Hall's work with Propeller continuously foregrounds actor contribution and encourages investment in the work, and this sense of actor ownership is vitally important to the health of the company. Hall shows a strong preference for working

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<sup>52</sup> "Fighting Here and Now."

<sup>53</sup> Charles Haugland, "Seeing Shakespeare Again for the First Time," Huntington Theatre Company, <http://www.huntingtontheatre.org/articles/Seeing-Shakespeare-Again-For-The-First-Time/>, accessed 28 June 2014.

with people he knows or who come recommended by people he trusts.<sup>54</sup> Hall cast *Henry V* out of actors he had talked to personally, and the offers were made through direct phone calls between director and actor without the presence of an intermediary agent.<sup>55</sup> Propeller eventually adopted a first-refusal casting policy, which guarantees actors within a production a role in the next one and is explored in depth in chapter 3. Hall's explanation of how the first-refusal casting policy came about makes passing glances to the Elizabethan era, connecting the policy back to traditional methods almost as an afterthought: "I wanted to keep it an actors' company. I suppose partly, subconsciously, in the tradition of Shakespeare's actors' companies. They didn't even have directors in those days."<sup>56</sup> In actuality, it stems from a desire to honor their work and recognize the extent to which the personal and the professional intertwine, bringing Hall's leadership of Propeller back to his own values and personal beliefs:

It also seemed natural to give the actors some degree of ownership of the work they did and so I have endeavored to give them a permanent place in the company unless they choose to opt out. An actor's life is deeply insecure, so it seemed important to me to give tangible security to people to help bond us into a group where everybody enjoyed the fruits of any successes we had.<sup>57</sup>

"Ownership" is a constant theme in Propeller's practice, ranging from the first-refusal casting policy to Pavelka's scenic and costume designs to the collaborative environment fostered in the rehearsal room. Hall's investment in his actors is keenly felt and comes across in the way they talk about him. He is "the 15th actor," a

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<sup>54</sup> James Tucker, personal interview, Stratford-upon-Avon, 12 February 2014; Joseph Chance, personal interview, Coventry, 13 February 2014; Chris Myles, personal interview, London, 11 November 2013. This preference is evident when looking at casting patterns across Hall's productions. Vince Leigh, Guy Williams, and Matthew Flynn, who all joined Propeller after *Henry V*, were part of Hall's 1995 *Othello* and Karl Davies was in an episode of *Spooks* Hall directed before he was cast in 2011's *Henry V* and *The Winter's Tale*, are two examples of actors finding a path into Propeller through outside projects. Conversely, Propeller actors often appear in Hall's non-Propeller productions, such as Nicholas Asbury in *Macbeth* (West End, 2001) or Dugald Bruce-Lockhart and Vincent Leigh in *Wonderland* (Hampstead Theatre, 2014).

<sup>55</sup> Tony Bell, personal interview, London, 1 April 2014; Nick Asbury, personal interview, Stratford-upon-Avon, 20 September 2013; Myles, personal interview.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in "Edward Hall on Propeller's *Henry V* and *The Winter's Tale*."

<sup>57</sup> Edward Hall, "Propeller brings wind of change to theatre," *The Yorkshire Post*, 7 January 2011, <http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/propeller-brings-wind-of-change-to-theatre-1-3030689>, accessed 25 April 2013.

“leader” who inspires “instant camaraderie,” a director who treats his cast as “artistic equals [...] involving them in how the story is going to be presented, while always remaining one step ahead, so they feel safe.”<sup>58</sup> Improvisation is encouraged in performance, the overall rehearsal system being predicated on a process of trial-and-error stemming from Hall’s view that the company should be “a creation of the work we were doing, rather than an idea made up in another room, a box we had to fit our aspirations into.”<sup>59</sup> Through it all, the notion of “play” is paramount, both the “play” of the story being told and “play” as an informal creative process that seeks to promote enjoyment of the work, which has been shown to have cognitive benefits in the rehearsal process.<sup>60</sup> Hall’s informality in the rehearsal room and his encouragement of actor input therefore contribute to spontaneity in performance as well as creative contribution. The actors’ sense of involvement and contribution, combined with the added security of knowing there is always a job for them, has led to a community of actors incredibly loyal to both the company as a whole, and to Hall as an individual. It has also resulted in a company that retains its single-sex status, an aspect of the company whose artistic effects are explored in chapter 3.

By the time 2001’s *Rose Rage* premiered, many of the initial goals Hall identified as part of *Henry V*’s production conceit — the use of specific points of reference to tell Hall’s version of Shakespeare’s story, Hall’s interpretation of “traditional” methods, and the importance of the actor and the all-male cast — had

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<sup>58</sup> Dugald Bruce-Lockhart, quoted in Emma Lee, “Bold approach to the Bard,” *Norwich Advertiser*, 15 February 2011, [http://www.eveningnews24.co.uk/what-s-on/theatre/bold\\_approach\\_to\\_the\\_bard\\_1\\_801817](http://www.eveningnews24.co.uk/what-s-on/theatre/bold_approach_to_the_bard_1_801817), accessed 25 April 2013; Chris Myles, quoted in Alex Ramon, “Propeller-spinning: An Interview with Chris Myles,” *Boycotting Trends* blog, 17 February 2011, <http://boycottingtrends.blogspot.co.uk/2012/02/propeller-spinning-interview-with-chris.html>, accessed 25 April 2013; Tony Bell, quoted in Dominic Cavendish, “Why I quit the RSC,” *The Telegraph*, 6 June 2002, 18.

<sup>59</sup> Lee; “Dominic takes the good with the Bard,” *The Star*, 14 January 2011, <http://www.thestar.co.uk/what-s-on/theatre/dominic-takes-the-good-with-bard-1-2993861>, accessed 25 April 2013; E. Hall, “Propeller brings winds of change to theatre.”

<sup>60</sup> John Lutterbie, *Towards a General Theory of Acting: Cognitive Science and Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 99.

coalesced to form Propeller's core production philosophy. Alongside these practical concerns regarding working practices, *Henry V* also foreshadowed a recurring theme in Propeller works: violence and the human body. By dividing the chorus up amongst the all-male cast, who haunted the stage as battle-weary soldiers when they were not re-living the experiences of Agincourt, Hall emphasized the status of the story as a kind of play-within-a-play, a collective memory wherein the soldiers could reflect on their experiences, which, in turn, reflected Hall's own concerns with humans' propensity for brutality. England in the 1980s, the time in which Hall was coming of age, was a nation constantly embroiled in violence. The Falklands War was illustrated with photos of men in fatigues sent abroad, only to return in coffins. Thatcher's privatization policies prompted miners' strikes, bringing police and participant, striker and strikebreaker into violent conflict with one another. The Provisional IRA continued to target England as part of a prolonged campaign for a united Ireland free from British rule, and, as the decade drew to a close, the UK experienced its worst domestic terrorist attack when an airplane flying from London exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 270 people.

In *Henry V*, violence was enacted on punch bags that represented bodies, with actors doubling over in pain each time a bag was hit. This method created an abstract presentation that nonetheless managed to emphasize the violence depicted — a technique that was repeated in Hall's subsequent production of *Henry V* for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2001 and Propeller's revival production in 2011. Even outside of his work with Propeller, Hall continuously returns to the idea of how people brutalize each other under the protection of "us-versus-them" mentalities.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Issues of violence are highlighted in his interviews for the Royal Shakespeare Company's editions of Shakespeare plays. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, "*Henry V*: In performance and beyond," in *Henry V*, eds. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), 193-194; Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, "*Julius Caesar*: In performance and beyond," in *Julius Caesar*, eds. Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), 155.

His three Shakespeare productions for the RSC — *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Julius Caesar*, and the aforementioned *Henry V* — all contain instances of conflict between friends resulting in violent confrontation. Recent productions for the Hampstead Theatre, of which he became artistic director in 2010, include *Good People* (which Hall described as “people debating what it actually means to be good to each other”) and *Wonderland*, a new play depicting the miners’ strike.<sup>62</sup> The productions’ focuses continue to demonstrate Hall’s view of theatre as instructional play, through which we are made to examine human behavior.

*Rose Rage*’s concept, which set the action in an Edwardian abattoir, is a clear illustration of Hall’s direction for Propeller drawing on his personal interests in human behavior, but it is not the only one, nor is it the only instance of violence serving as a narrative through-line. Hall’s choice of play is motivated by the company, picking plays to which Propeller’s approach is well-suited. However, Hall has also repeatedly chosen for Propeller plays which focus on the body and the physical damage it can sustain or inflict. To date, Propeller’s repertoire comprises entirely of comedies and histories in which the violence could easily be overlooked as amusing or valiant.<sup>63</sup> Under Hall’s direction, the plays instead become troubling reflections of how people treat one another: the English soldier ruthlessly striking his French prisoner in *Henry V*, Katherine’s marriage to Petruchio presented as a series of brutal beatings in *The Taming of the Shrew*, and the Venetian communities of Christians and Jews re-imagined as lethal prison gangs in *The Merchant of Venice*. Even when Hall gravitates towards an arguably lighter work, such as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* or *The Comedy of Errors*, the productions still take on a menacing quality and the physical action features

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<sup>62</sup> Edward Hall, quoted in Fiona Mountford, “How artistic director Edward Hall saved the Hampstead Theatre,” *London Evening Standard*, 26 March 2014, <http://www.standard.co.uk/goingout/theatre/how-artistic-director-edward-hall-saved-hampstead-theatre-9216082.html>, accessed 18 May 2015.

<sup>63</sup> As tragedies tend to focus on an individual and the consequences of his actions, their structure makes them largely unsuited for Propeller’s ensemble approach.

prominent slapstick violence. Hall traces the success of directors back to their skill at “releasing a play,” believing that “a good director senses what the writer is trying to say — that is where you must start and finish,” but his interpretations of Shakespeare for Propeller go beyond the words on the page.<sup>64</sup> In his statement, Hall gives the director the authority to decide what Shakespeare is “trying to say,” placing the emphasis on his own responses to the work. Hall then interprets these responses through his own understanding of traditional performance methodology that concentrates on the actor’s abilities to create the world of the play through his physical presence.

In no production did this theme become more apparent than in *Rose Rage*, Propeller’s 2001 adaptation of the *Henry VI* plays, which capitalized on the plays’ recurring themes of butchery. Since the mid-twentieth century the *Henry VI* trilogy, often produced as part of larger history cycles, has been popular with directors looking to either affirm or challenge perceptions of British identity, primarily through highlighting the plays’ parallels with contemporary political issues.<sup>65</sup> It was the *Henry VI* trilogy in 1963 that, adapted and combined with *Richard III* to form *The Wars of the Roses*, solidified the RSC’s burgeoning reputation as England’s national theatre for Shakespeare. The visual focus of that production was Henry’s council table, which made clear the political maneuverings of the court through the ever-shifting constellations of bodies seated around the king, alluding to the ways in which modern politicians sacrifice the nation for their own concerns. Over two decades later, Michael Bogdanov’s 1986 *Wars of the Roses* production, part of the English Shakespeare

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<sup>64</sup> Edward Hall, quoted in Terri Paddock, “20 Questions with Edward Hall,” WhatsOnStage.com, 17 June 2002, [http://www.whatsonstage.com/west-end-theatre/news/06-2002/20-questions-withedward-hall\\_27572.html](http://www.whatsonstage.com/west-end-theatre/news/06-2002/20-questions-withedward-hall_27572.html), accessed 20 April 2013.

<sup>65</sup> Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Carol Chillington Rutter, “Introduction: Henry VI and national culture,” in *Shakespeare in Performance: The Henry VI Plays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 1-14; Roger Warren, introduction to *Henry VI, Part Two*, by William Shakespeare, ed. Roger Warren (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1-6, 10, 17.



Company's history cycle, was not nearly so subtle in connecting the plays to contemporary politics. Jack Cade was a punk nationalist and Margaret of Anjou was consciously styled on another "Iron Lady." Both of these productions are indicative of how the plays are usually interpreted through a political lens, a tradition Hall markedly broke from with Propeller's version. The title, *Rose Rage*, signaled the tone of the production by exchanging a formalized, grand title drawing on England's history for an irreverent pun on the blind self-interest that leads to pile-ups of casual, senseless, and anonymous violence.

Michael Pavelka responded to the text by setting the action in an abattoir modeled loosely on the Spitalfields meat market.<sup>66</sup> Drawing inspiration from the film "A Clockwork Orange," Hall "wanted to make the violence in *Rose Rage* similarly beautiful to heighten our sense of revulsion and to express the lengths that characters would go to in order to cause pain to one another."<sup>67</sup> The abattoir setting was the "abstracted environment" Hall and Pavelka strove to create and provided Hall with a framework wherein he could continue the experiments with theatrical violence he had begun with the punch bags of *Henry V*.<sup>68</sup> Offal, meat and cabbages became surrogates for the unlucky victims of the play. The sickening smacks of meat slapping upon a table or the wet slicing of blade through intestines added to the suffering of each dispatched Englishmen, releasing a smell that hung in the air as the remains gathered on the floor, presenting the cost of civil war in stark visual terms.

*Rose Rage* exemplifies how Hall and textual advisor Roger Warren work together to create versions of Shakespeare's plays that then become Propeller

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<sup>66</sup> Michael Pavelka, "O bloody spectacle!: An interview with the designer of *Rose Rage*," *Shakespeare in Action* education pack (The Watermill Theatre, 2001), np.

<sup>67</sup> Edward Hall, "Butchers and Villains": An interview with the director of *Rose Rage*," *Shakespeare in Action* education pack (The Watermill Theatre, 2001), np. The film 'If...' was an additional inspiration for the use of violence within the production. Tatspaugh, 243-244.

<sup>68</sup> E. Hall, "Butchers and Villains."

productions. Hall's exposure to theatre from a young age instilled in him a view of theatre as creative play, a practice through which people can better understand human experiences and a medium that demands creativity. It is this view of theatre as a creative outlet that motivated him to try to find unexpected ways of performing Shakespeare's plays. To do this, Hall focused on theatre's sense of occasion and immediacy, emphasized the live quality of theatre, and honored the role of the actor as the most important theatrical component, all of which he contextualized through his interpretation of traditional methodology. These are the foundation on which Propeller was built, and it is now possible to look more closely at how this foundation is built upon through various production aspects, beginning with Hall's preparation of the play script. In his approach to the text, Hall embodies Robert L. Benedetti's ideas of the "liberal" director. Benedetti defines the liberal director as someone who

holds that the value of a play lies in the way it lives relative to the present moment, and that a successful production results when the essential spirit of the play, transmitted by but not entirely bound in the text, is happily married to the specifics of a given cast, theatre, and audience, even if this requires some adjustment in the play's form such as changes in period, language, or even structure.<sup>69</sup>

The extensive cutting, rearranging and interpolating that Hall accomplishes with Warren to create his play-text aligns him with directors like Charles Marowitz who believe honoring Shakespeare's intentions is not achieved through

the routine repetition of his words and imagery, but the *Shakespearian Experience*, and, ironically, that can only come from dissolving the works into a new compound — that is, creating the sense of vicissitude, variety and intellectual vigor with which the author himself confronted his own time.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Robert L. Benedetti, *The Director at Work* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985), 14.

<sup>70</sup> Charles Marowitz, *Recycling Shakespeare* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), 31. Original emphasis.

A comparison of the RSC and Propeller's respective productions of the *Henry VI* trilogy from 1963 and 2001, respectively, shows a contrast in approach to realize ultimately the same goal: making Shakespeare relevant for modern audiences.

## The Adaptation Process

If, as W. B. Worthen asserts, “the director negotiates the production’s relation to ‘Shakespeare,’” then the process by which *Henry VI* became *Rose Rage* illustrates Hall’s own view of what “Shakespeare” means, both through the themes and narratives he, along with designer Michael Pavelka, textual advisor Roger Warren and input from the company, chose to highlight, as well as the way in which Hall defined the production as “Shakespeare” despite significant changes to the text.<sup>71</sup> The performance history of the *Henry VI* plays is less robust than that of many of Shakespeare’s other history plays, and has only really gained performance prominence in the second half of the twentieth century. Early twentieth century productions of the trilogy include Frank Benson’s 1906 productions for the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre and Douglas Seale’s 1957 productions at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre during Barry Jackson’s time as artistic director.<sup>72</sup> Neither of these productions, however, had as much of an impact on the perception of the *Henry VI* plays as the Royal Shakespeare Company’s *The Wars of the Roses* in 1963. Directed by Peter Hall and John Barton, and based on Barton’s adapted script, the production achieved a prominence and popularity that would contribute to an accelerated pace of production of the *Henry VI* plays in the post-World-War-II era, as well as being a significant example of Shakespearean adaptation. I use its aims and process as a point

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<sup>71</sup> W. B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 39.

<sup>72</sup> Hampton-Reeves and Rutter, 37, 41-45.

of comparison with *Rose Rage* to illustrate the goals of Propeller's production as shaped by Edward Hall and Warren.

To what extent a director must defend his or her production as "Shakespeare" depends on the perceived gap between the theatrical product and the work. One way in which this gap is produced is through extensive work done to the text itself, using such methods as cutting, transposing, or modernizing.<sup>73</sup> The difficulty with using the text as a benchmark to judge a production's fidelity to Shakespeare, however, lies in the fact that it "requires a certain confidence in the identity of the text itself."<sup>74</sup> The conditions of creation for Shakespeare's works — collaboration with other playwrights and actors, restrictions caused by resources, the needs of the acting company, and censorship, to name but a few — and the works' subsequent reproduction in varying published forms — quarto, folio, scripts, promptbooks, acting editions, scholarly editions — lead to a fluid "text" which lacks a definitive, stable identity.<sup>75</sup> Another way in which a production might seemingly distance itself from "Shakespeare" is the extent to which it is seen to honor or betray what is perceived as ideologically inherent in the work, through thematic interpretation, the methods of production employed, or a combination of the two. In this scenario, what constitutes "Shakespeare" is variably defined by a director's own interests, as can be seen through the contrast between the "authenticity" of Victorian productions seeking to realize the potential of Shakespeare's evocative imagery and the staging experiments of Poel, who sought to recreate Elizabethan theatrical practice.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Because it is standard practice to alter Shakespeare's plays in some way for production, the extent to which textual emendation is seen to alter the authority of the text is dependent on how other aspects of a production are perceived. Worthen 61-63.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

Peter Hall's decision to stage *The Wars of the Roses* was as much a pragmatic decision, closely linked to financial considerations, as an artistic one. In 1962, bureaucratic maneuverings related to the establishment of a National Theatre, and the Arts Council's increased unwillingness to provide subsidies in the necessary amounts to the RSC threatened the theatre's future. The overall deficit of the 1961 season was £30,000 and the company continued to lose money through renting the Aldwych in London, part of Peter Hall's efforts to provide a structure that would attract and retain a stable company of actors.<sup>77</sup> Subsidy for the 1961/2 and 1962/3 seasons were denied and, after a lengthy battle waged largely through an aggressive press campaign, £47,000 was granted for 1963/4 season, amounting to "far less than the company had requested and inadequate for its purposes."<sup>78</sup> In mounting the *Henry VI* plays, alongside *Richard III*, Peter Hall made a bid to increase the profile of the RSC in a way that would guarantee future grants and cement the company's reputation as the premiere Shakespeare company in England, independent of the London-based National Theatre.<sup>79</sup>

The desire to produce the *Henry VI* plays as a trilogy was the first interpretive choice made by Peter Hall and Barton, as Peter Hall acknowledged "the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III* were almost certainly not originally conceived as a cycle."<sup>80</sup> However, the presentation of all three plays satisfied Peter Hall's interest in exploring the cycles of power, prophecy, and retribution and allowed for *Richard III* to become "the retributive culmination of a struggle for power, its principal character [...]"

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<sup>77</sup> Sally Beauman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company: A History in Ten Decades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 255.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 257, 260-264.

<sup>79</sup> Fordham Flower wrote "These productions were Peter's last chance; he sank or swam by them, and the fortunes of the company depended on them." *Ibid.*, 269.

<sup>80</sup> Peter Hall, introduction to *The Wars of the Roses: adapted for the Royal Shakespeare Company from William Shakespeare's VI, parts 1, 2, 3 and Richard III*, by John Barton and Peter Hall (London: BBC Books, 1970), xii. Hall then speculates that the success of *Henry VI part I* "compelled sequels." Scholarship has since supported the idea that *Henry VI part I* was, in fact, the last of the three plays to be written, serving as a kind of theatrical prequel. Hampton-Reeves and Rutter, 15.

embodying in his own anarchic self a judgment on the country that he rules.”<sup>81</sup> The desire to include *Richard III*, combined with the *Henry VI* plays’ relative obscurity, dictated the need for extensive revisions, as described by Barton:

We decided at the outset that if we were to stage the *Henry VI* plays at all we would have to condense the three plays into two. This decision was strictly practical. Although it is very much part of the Royal Shakespeare Company’s policy to present the lesser-known plays in the canon, we have perforce to be cautious about the number of rarities we include in our repertory in a given year.<sup>82</sup>

Uncut, the three *Henry VI* plays and *Richard III* offer an estimated twelve and a half hours of playing time and feature over 150 characters.<sup>83</sup> The potential cost of mounting the productions is daunting, especially if there is uncertainty about them drawing an audience. Peter Hall and Barton, therefore, needed to find a compromise that would tell the story while still enticing audiences to the theatre. The resulting *The Wars of the Roses* was comprised of three individual productions entitled *Henry VI*, *Edward IV* and *Richard III*. Of the approximately 12,350 original lines, approximately half were retained by Barton in the process of adaptation.<sup>84</sup> Peter Hall cautioned Barton that “we need to pare down the inessentials, clarify the plot line, and have fewer scenes,” a reflection of his own experience seeing the plays and finding them to be “a mess of angry and undifferentiated barons, thrashing about in a mass of diffuse narrative.”<sup>85</sup> Additionally, Barton composed 1,400 additional lines, which simplified

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<sup>81</sup> P. Hall, introduction, xii.

<sup>82</sup> John Barton, “The Making of the Adaptation,” in *The Wars of the Roses: adapted for the Royal Shakespeare Company from William Shakespeare’s VI, parts 1, 2, 3 and Richard III*, by John Barton and Peter Hall (London: BBC Books, 1970), xv-xvi. See also: Beauman, 339.

<sup>83</sup> Based on the figures offered by *Play Shakespeare* that estimate the speaking rate of Shakespeare performance to be words to be 1000 lines per hour and the following line counts for the four plays discussed: *Henry VI part I* (2702), *Henry VI part II* (3125), *Henry VI part III* (2932) and *Richard III* (3718). “Play Lengths,” *Play Shakespeare*, <https://www.playshakespeare.com/study/play-lengths>, accessed 7 July 2015. The number of characters is based on those listed in Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett and William Montgomery, eds., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 56, 92, 154, 184.

<sup>84</sup> Barton, xvi.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Barton, xix; P. Hall, introduction, vii.

the narrative, “reduced the complexities of the plays and heightened one aspect of them above all — the study they presented of the intricacies of political power.”<sup>86</sup>

The purpose of such radical rewrites was a combination of pragmatism and artistry, but changes to the text were subsequently presented to the public as the only way to translate Shakespeare’s intentions to modern audiences. A program note for *Henry VI* explained:

The three parts of *Henry VI* display a unique vision of history. But because they are early work, Shakespeare’s mastery is impaired by inconsistencies and confusions. We have therefore adapted the three *Henry VI*’s into two plays [...] to reduce their length and try and sharpen their meaning. [...] Though it is our conviction that mature Shakespeare cannot be monkeyed with — even cutting is perilous — we are sure that these early plays produced in an unadapted form would not show to a modern audience the force of their political and human meaning. We believe and hope that we have not changed Shakespeare’s main intentions.<sup>87</sup>

In this instance, “Shakespeare” for Peter Hall and Barton exists in the plays’ “political and human meaning,” and it is only through reworking the text that his intentions can be revealed. In this program note, Peter Hall and Barton credit the “inconstancies and confusions” as the work of young writer, and, in subsequent writings, Peter Hall questioned whether the work was entirely Shakespeare’s, though he still considered them to contain “Shakespearean” values.<sup>88</sup> Barton positioned his own work on the text as finishing what Shakespeare started:

I believe that Shakespeare’s revision was fitful, pragmatic and hasty, and that the result if not something of which he would have claimed ‘this cycle is more or less as I want it’, but rather ‘it will serve’. Consequently I regard our adaptation not as an improvement of absolute Shakespeare but as a further revision of only partly revised originals.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Beauman, 270.

<sup>87</sup> Peter Hall and John Barton, *Henry VI* program (Stratford-upon-Avon: Royal Shakespeare Theatre, 1964), np.

<sup>88</sup> P. Hall, introduction, ix.

<sup>89</sup> Barton, xxiv.

This statement frames Barton and Peter Hall's adaptation as necessary to realize what they saw to be Shakespeare's intentions in a way that would be communicable to their audiences. However, this view of Shakespeare's intentions is closely linked with Peter Hall's own professed interest in politics and the influence of Jan Kott's *Shakespeare: Our Contemporary*, which Peter Hall read during rehearsals for *The Wars of the Roses*.<sup>90</sup> The council table, which was used to chart the rise and fall of the nobles' fortunes during the plays, was a unifying feature hit upon by Peter Hall, Barton, and set designer John Bury. Working with Barton, Peter Hall created an ideological version of Shakespeare reflective of his own interest in order and politics, and through this "Shakespeare" legitimized his own interpretation of the text.

The exploration of how Peter Hall and Barton adapted the *Henry VI* plays into *The Wars of the Roses* begins to reveal how practical considerations and the personal interests brought to bear on a production result in an adaptation highlighting specific aspects of Shakespeare's work. Just as Barton's work on the text and co-direction was a guiding influence in realizing Peter Hall's vision of a highly political staging of the plays, Roger Warren's work with Edward Hall on creating the *Rose Rage* script was instrumental in developing the production's central theme of casual violence.<sup>91</sup>

A frequent contributing editor for the Oxford Shakespeare series, Warren's editorial approach to Shakespeare's works first and foremost identifies them as echoes of past performances, shaped as much by the actors as the author. He most notably demonstrates this view in an article that compares the Quarto and Folio versions of *Henry VI Part 2*. After analyzing the possibility that the Quarto version is an actor's memorial reconstruction of the play, Warren concludes that both the Quarto and

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<sup>90</sup> P. Hall, introduction, xi.

<sup>91</sup> *Rose Rage* marked Warren's first collaboration with Propeller, though not his first with Edward Hall: he had prepared the 2001 performing text for Hall's *Julius Caesar* at the RSC.



Folio trace their origins back to a third, unknown version of the play.<sup>92</sup> His analysis equates the impact of the actors influencing and re-forming the play through rehearsal and performance with that of Shakespeare's original authorship, demonstrating how the act of performance may have improved upon Shakespeare's play and consequently become part of the work we now see as "Shakespeare."<sup>93</sup> Moreover, his opinions of the theatrical potential of the *Henry VI* plays align with those of Peter Hall and Barton who thought them to require an editorial hand. Reviewing Terry Hands' uncut 1977 productions of the plays, again for the RSC, Warren remarked on the "the jog-trotting ineptitude of the couplets," noting "I have never before felt so certain, watching a Shakespeare play, that a passage was non-Shakespearian."<sup>94</sup> Warren's criticism was based not in the performance of the text but in the text itself, and his conviction that certain passages were "non-Shakespearean" creates a space for a production to improve upon the writing. Warren saw Hands' productions as evidence that "to tell the story simply is insufficient" and resulted in productions where "[s]hape, development and finally meaning were absent."<sup>95</sup> Warren believed that, without a clear directorial thrust, the plays were not able to stand alone. Most significantly, he mourned the lack of "clear shape" and "very powerful sense of purpose" in Hands' productions that had been evident in *The Wars of the Roses*. Though Warren admits this may have been Peter Hall and Barton's "shape" rather than Shakespeare's, he nonetheless expresses the opinion that the plays benefit from such a strong directorial concept, which strongly highlights the individual characters and their relationships.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Roger Warren, "The Quarto and Folio Texts of *2 Henry VI*: A Reconsideration," *Review of English Studies* 51, no. 2 (2000): 206.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>94</sup> Roger Warren, in reference to Part I, "Comedies and Histories at Two Stratford, 1977," *Shakespeare Survey* 31 (1979), 148.

<sup>95</sup> In reference to Parts II and III, *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

Hall's decision to stage his own version of the *Henry VI* trilogy was never specifically explained as a response to his father's productions. However, the timing of Hall's production and the fame of Peter Hall's trilogy is difficult to completely separate when speculating on the origins of *Rose Rage*. Propeller actor Nick Asbury believes Hall was drawn to the works as those written by "a young fiery man," and was in part led by the needs and direction naturally coming out of his work with the actors.<sup>97</sup> At the same time, press attention presented Hall as the "reluctant heir" to his father's legacy, repeatedly tying Hall to his father's work.<sup>98</sup> Moreover there are many similarities to be seen when comparing *Rose Rage* with *The Wars of the Roses*. For one thing, the thematic shape of *Rose Rage* borrowed heavily from *The Wars of the Roses*. The importance of order, which Peter Hall advised Barton needed to be "hammer[ed] home throughout the play," was echoed in a program note which defined *Rose Rage*'s narrative arc through the king's loss of control.<sup>99</sup> Peter Hall's belief that the plays contained significant resonances to the "blood-soaked century" in which *The Wars of the Roses* was produced reemerged in Warren's explanation of the plays' twentieth century production popularity.<sup>100</sup> Whereas cabbages were used offstage in *The Wars of the Roses* to create the sound of decapitations, in *Rose Rage* they took center stage as visual representation of the gruesome murders.<sup>101</sup> Despite these similarities, *Rose Rage* was far from a simple echo of an earlier production. Confined by a different set of practical considerations, focusing on different key themes, and favoring a

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<sup>97</sup> Asbury, personal interview.

<sup>98</sup> Lyn Gardner, "The son also rises," *The Guardian*, 25 February 1998, A13. A sampling of press quotes shows the relentless desire to connect Edward Hall to his father. Fiachra Gibbons, "Award victory for play denied West End Run," *The Guardian* 8 November 1999, 4; Jeremy Kingston, "Room for one more in the Hall of fame?," *The Times*, 19 February 1998, 37. Nor were such connections limited to Hall's theatrical work. When football pre-empted Hall's TV film 'Safari Strife', causing it to be dropped from the schedule, Nancy Banks-Smith reflected that "This is hard on a first-time director like Edward Hall. Fortunately, starvation was not on the menu. He is the son of Peter Hall." "That was no hippo. That was my wife." *The Guardian*, 16 December 1998, A19.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Barton, "The Making of the Adaptation," xix; "Order and Degree," *Rose Rage* program, Propeller (Newbury: Watermill Theatre, 2001), np.

<sup>100</sup> Roger Warren, "From Henry VI to Rose Rage," *Rose Rage* program (Newbury: Watermill Theatre, 2001), np.

<sup>101</sup> Richard A. Pearson, *A Band of Arrogant and United Heroes: The Story of the Royal Shakespeare Company production of The Wars of the Roses* (London: Adelphi Press, 1990), 69.

modern aesthetic, *Rose Rage* exemplified Hall and Propeller's goals in performing Shakespeare. These contrasts reveal Hall's interpretation of the *Henry VI* as a rejection of much of what Peter Hall had done in the 1960s, a clear statement of purpose from a young director establishing his independence from his famous father.

Peter Hall and Barton had come to the *Henry VI* plays at a time when its production history was relatively sparse. In contrast, Edward Hall's decision to adapt the plays for Propeller in 2001 drew on what was by then a rich tradition of directors using the *Henry VI* plays to establish themselves on the theatrical landscape. The success of *The Wars of the Roses* had had a dual effect: revealing the plays as compelling dramas that could — and would — attract audiences and forever linking them to Peter Hall and Barton's specific interpretation. Such was the shadow of *Wars* that it was not until 1977 that the *Henry VI* trilogy returned to the RSC in the form of Terry Hands' uncut productions. Even then, the spirit of *Wars* lingered, the complete texts leaving some audience members "longing for the clarity, and consistency of the Barton-Hall version."<sup>102</sup> Hands' uncut history cycle was then followed by a number of high-profile productions of the plays: Adrian Noble (*The Plantagenets*, 1988-9) and Michael Boyd (2000-1) both undertook it at the RSC, and it was the inaugural production of the newly-established English Shakespeare Company in 1986.<sup>103</sup> Propeller solidified as a company in 1999 during rehearsal for *Twelfth Night*, and the decision to stage an adaptation of *Henry VI* for their first project as an official company perpetuates the use of these plays as a kind of calling card through which to

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<sup>102</sup> Lois Potter, "Recycling the Early Histories: 'The Wars of the Roses' and 'The Plantagenets,'" *Shakespeare Survey* 43 (1991), 171. Michael Billington also held the image of the Barton-Hall version in his mind while watching Hands' version, regretting Hands' production of *1 Henry VI* lacked a "key visual metaphor to carry one through the endless broils and battles." "Henry VI part 1," *The Guardian*, 13 July 1977, 10.

<sup>103</sup> Boyd's *Henry VI* trilogy and *Richard III* was joined by *Richard II* directed by Steven Pimlott, *Henry IV pt. 1* and *Henry IV pt. 2* directed by Michael Attenborough, and Edward Hall's own production of *Henry V* to form an RSC history series marketed under the title "This England." Though linked under this title, each director's contribution was treated as an individual production and no attempt was made to make the productions resemble each other.

demonstrate a director or company's particular manner of producing Shakespeare's works.

Rather than having to overcome the plays' obscurity, Propeller's limitations in adapting the plays were defined by the resources of the Watermill Theatre and the needs of their audiences. The first consideration was the potential running time of the three plays. "We didn't particularly want to condense a nine-hour trilogy [...]," Hall explained, "but we wanted to do the plays and we knew there was no way we could do nine hours in a regional theatre."<sup>104</sup> Limiting themselves to the *Henry VI* plays only, Hall and Warren cut down the approximate nine hours of playing time to four, creating two separate productions of two hours each, entitled *Rose Rage Part I* and *Rose Rage Part II*. Furthermore, it was necessary to adapt the works to fit the needs of the company. Propeller has always confined itself to small casts, consisting of between nine and fifteen actors. This small size was initially because of the Watermill theatre's small stage and limited budget, making it necessary to reduce the plays' hundred parts into a number that could be played by twelve actors.<sup>105</sup>

The adaptive process of *Rose Rage* was described by both Hall and Warren as an exercise not in what to cut but in what to retain, and alongside these practical considerations came Hall's artistic and interpretive aims. Responsible for the initial drafts of the script, which would then be refined by Warren, Hall took out "anything that didn't make sense or bored him."<sup>106</sup> The former concern is based on the internal logic of the story being told, while the second connects the adaptation to Hall's own emotional response and subjective preferences. By streamlining the narrative and

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<sup>104</sup> Paddock.

<sup>105</sup> In a 1980 article by Sheridan Morley, then-manager Michael Elwyn estimates the size of the Watermill stage as 20ft by 15ft. "A theatre in a Watermill," *The Times*, 14 June 1980, 10. Propeller's twelve actors played forty-four roles across the two parts of *Rose Rage*.

<sup>106</sup> Tai Williams, "Rose Rage to bloom at the Watermill," *Rose Rage* review pack 2001, personal collection of Tony Bell.

clarifying the backstory, Hall felt the productions could attract “a greater cross section of people who come see the shows.”<sup>107</sup> This approach was consistent with Hall’s view of Shakespeare as “a populist, commercial writer” and “a great craftsman who wrote brilliant stories that appealed to all sorts of audiences.”<sup>108</sup> Unlike Peter Hall and Barton, who publicly defended their adaptation as refining inferior work so as to reveal and clarify what they saw as Shakespeare’s true intentions, Hall’s view of the adaptive process embraced the need to suit the works to modern sensibilities:

If I wanted to do it in three three-hour plays, what chance would I have? I think everyone knows the answer to that. Do we, then, never get to see the plays at all or do we get to see them in this format? If that is the choice, I would rather do it this way than not at all [...] We have to adapt. If we didn’t many of Shakespeare’s plays would remain inaccessible.<sup>109</sup>

Hall’s primary concern, therefore, was to revitalize the works’ popular appeal through their performance potential.

What Hall saw as the plays’ performance potential was revealed in *Rose Rage*’s central theme: the cycle of violence. Hall believed this theme would be easily recognizable to *Rose Rage*’s audiences:

One tiny disagreement and it spreads like nuclear fusion. There are so many instances of that, such as Northern Ireland, Rwanda, Bosnia or the Nazis in Germany. People don’t forget that their father was killed, their daughter raped. There’s no message in all of this, however. Shakespeare’s not preaching, he’s simply showing us how things are. He writes about people, not messages.<sup>110</sup>

His view that Shakespeare “writes about people, not messages” defined the differences in his approach from that of his father, who felt that the plays were Shakespeare’s

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<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Louise Parratt, “Shakespeare is cut down to size,” *Rose Rage* review pack, 2001, personal collection of Tony Bell.

<sup>108</sup> Paddock.

<sup>109</sup> Quoted in Gill Isted, “Blood thicker than slaughter,” *The Chronicle*, 7 September 2001, *Rose Rage* review pack, personal collection of Tony Bell.

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Helen Peacocke, “Shakespeare’s all the rage,” *The Oxford Times Weekend*, 16 February 2001, 2.

mediation on how “[Richard II’s] deposition is a wound in the body politic which festers through reign after reign, a sin which can only be expiated by the letting of large quantities of blood.”<sup>111</sup> Conceptualizing *The Wars of the Roses* in this way moved the plays towards abstract concepts of sin and redemption, presenting individuals’ actions as part of larger universal plan. Hall’s concern was to examine the secular way in which people interact with one another, keeping the responsibility for people’s actions firmly on the individual. To achieve their aims, Peter Hall and Barton cut the plays heavily to form *The Wars of the Roses*’ narrative around “the roles of the two Gloucesters,” Humphrey and Richard.<sup>112</sup> The narrative of *Rose Rage* was likewise streamlined, but rather than tracking the political and moral implications of Humphrey’s downfall and Richard’s ascent, *Rose Rage* focused on violent escalation of revenge. According to Warren, the fall of Duke Humphrey:

provides the shape for our first evening: but we have also attempted to bring the development of the York/Somerset quarrel into sharper focus than in the original, while reinforcing the central importance of the relationship between Henry’s queen Margaret and the Duke of Suffolk [...] Margaret’s desire for revenge motivates the increasing savagery of her opposition to the house of York and intensifies the Wars of the Roses.<sup>113</sup>

In Peter Hall and Barton’s version, the central tension between Humphrey and Richard was an embodiment of the wheel of fortune, as the universe orchestrates the cyclical rise and fall of individuals according to a cosmic plan for justice. Warren’s description of *Rose Rage*’s narrative progression removes the element of fate and instead categorizes the action as the result of unchecked human passions. Described by Pavelka, “The text for *Rose Rage* places an emphasis on our national psyche and its

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<sup>111</sup> P. Hall, introduction, xiii.

<sup>112</sup> John Cox and Eric Rasmussen, introduction to *King Henry VI part 3* by William Shakespeare, ed. John Cox and Eric Rasmussen (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2001), 21.

<sup>113</sup> Warren, “From Henry VI to Rose Rage.”

(not unique!) propensity towards bouts of wholesale slaughter.”<sup>114</sup> It is telling that Pavelka makes a point to invoke the adaptation title as opposed to Shakespeare’s. Human capacity for violence is *Rose Rage*’s, and therefore Hall’s, emphasis through a specific interpretation of Shakespeare’s work.

To determine whether Hall’s goals — to highlight the cyclical nature of the violence, to create a clear narrative, highlighting personal relationships, and to present Shakespeare’s works in such a way that they would connect with modern audiences — were successful requires an examination of *Rose Rage* in performance. I will therefore examine two moments from *Rose Rage Part I*, the opening scene and Cade’s rebellion, to test Hall’s aims in practice. Because *Rose Rage* marked the evolution from Propeller’s initial formation as an ad-hoc theatrical experiment into an established company with a signature production aesthetic, such an examination will be useful not only in revealing how the process of adaptation confirms or denies Hall’s professed interests in the performance of Shakespeare’s works, but also what the characteristics of a Propeller production are before each element is explored in following chapters.

## Rose Rage: Text in Performance

*The first impression is one of violent geometry: the shapes of childhood learning games pieced together to form a menacing cage. Three large walls of metal screening, squares within squares, confine the stage, not quite concealing the rows of metal lockers behind them: small square numbers hint at unseen owners. Four circular rings hang from the ceiling, such as one may find in a gymnasium, but the negative space of the loops recall nooses as much as L-sits. Hooks, some with pristine white coats hanging from them, and platforms jut out from the screens, alternating with narrow ladders climbing up into the air above the playing space. It is a space of sharp lines and sharper corners, cold materials and confined spaces. It is a carefully ordered, precise world, mathematical and inhuman, initially devoid of life. But then they begin to appear, one by one, emerging from the shadows, stalking the platforms. The white coats, initially only seen hanging from hooks, begin to multiply, worn by figures whose mouths are covered by white masks and whose hands are occupied with knives*

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<sup>114</sup> Pavelka, “O bloody spectacle!”

*and cleavers. It is clear they are butchers, but, as they silently eye the spectators fumbling with programs and double checking seat numbers, it is unclear for what type of flesh their sharpened blades are waiting*<sup>115</sup>

Such extra-textual opening moments are a strong part of Propeller's production experience. With Propeller, Hall aims to "create some of the atmosphere that must have been part of the experience of watching the plays in the outdoor theatre," expanding the world of the play beyond the stage and into the auditorium and or even further, as in the outdoor moments included in *Henry V*.<sup>116</sup> This technique resurfaced in subsequent productions, and the use of a pre-show became an integral part of constructing the production environment.<sup>117</sup> Though non-verbal, *Rose Rage*'s opening provided a framework for how Hall's interpretation of Shakespeare's work would be conveyed to audiences. The silent observation of audience members by actors challenged the relationship between spectator and performer by reversing the roles, consequently eradicating the usual anonymity offered to audiences by the imagined fourth wall. The violence depicted onstage constituted an immediate threat to patrons, whose acknowledged presence by the company included them in the action. Rather than present the concerns of the play through the distancing lens of history that allows patrons to apply the themes to their own lives through passive observation, *Rose Rage*'s inclusion of the audience located the action of the production in the immediate present. The use of "Jerusalem" in the opening moments further implicated English audiences in the onstage events, playing on the hymn's popular association with England and St. George's Day.<sup>118</sup> The lyrics, from a poem by William Blake, talk of building "Jerusalem / In England's green and pleasant land," and

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<sup>115</sup> Description drawn from published accounts of the production in performance. Hampton-Reeves Rutter, 188; Tatspaugh, 244.

<sup>116</sup> E. Hall, "Rose Rage: The Company," 5.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Hampton-Reeves and Rutter, 188.



contrast pastoral imagery with that of the industrial revolution.<sup>119</sup> The juxtaposition between a longed-for land of light and serenity with the menacing encroachment of industrial darkness connects to feelings of entrapment, and the cold inhumanity of the scenic design aligned the action of the production with the “dark Satanic mills” referenced by Blake. The hymn’s patriotic associations — it is sung in many public schools, is performed at the Last Night of the Proms, closes the Labour Party’s annual conference, and has strong associations with rugby — foreshadowed how the production was concerned with exploring how such conditions affected domestic behaviors, presenting the ensuing cruelty as pointedly English.

The play’s main action began as the butchers traded white-smocks for frock-coats and military jackets and assembled onstage for the funeral of Henry V. Here, *Rose Rage*’s adaptive process began to reveal itself in verbal terms, with Gloucester (Matt Flynn) reading Henry V’s will. The passage, taken from Hall’s *Chronicles* (and defended in program materials as one of Shakespeare’s original sources) was based on the same one used by Peter Hall and Barton to open *The Wars of the Roses* and retained the same basic structure: an identification of whose funeral it was (“Since now I shall be taken from you, I, Henry the Fifth...”), a charge of loyalty to Henry VI, instructions for the division of responsibility during the new king’s minority, and a final command that “What I have gotten, I charge you keep it, I command you defend it, and I desire you nourish it.”<sup>120</sup> In Peter Hall and Barton’s *The Wars of the Roses*, the desire was to set up “the curse on England” and construct a pattern of foreknowledge and prophecy.<sup>121</sup> The will was heard by spectators as a voiceover, read by Henry V’s

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<sup>119</sup> Saree Makdisi, “The political aesthetic of Blake’s images,” in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. Morris Eaves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 115.

<sup>120</sup> Edward Hall and Roger Warren, eds., *Rose Rage: An adaptation of the Henry VI plays in two parts* (London: Oberon Books, Ltd., 2001), 13; John Barton and Peter Hall, *The Wars of the Roses: adapted for the Royal Shakespeare Company from William Shakespeare’s VI, parts 1, 2, 3 and Richard III* (London: BBC Books, 1970), 3.

<sup>121</sup> Barton, xx.

disembodied voice.<sup>122</sup> This technique allowed Peter Hall and Barton to create another world, a supernatural vantage point from which the unfolding actions of the nobility could be observed and judged. *Rose Rage*, too, fostered a feeling of observation, but it was not a mystical, unseen presence which watched over the warring nobles. Instead, as the will was read and the nobles began their petty sniping, one of the butchers that had eyed the audience in the opening moments watched from the upstage walkway, his stance relaxed, but attentive. In further contrast, *Rose Rage* presented the will as a physical piece of paper that was first cut open by one of the choric butchers before it was handed to Flynn's Gloucester to read.<sup>123</sup> The main action of the play was therefore instigated by the butcher, whose presence was used throughout the production as a physicalization of the violence, an embodiment of human nature's capacity for cruelty. Linking the butcher with Gloucester through the opening of the will, the production made a visual connection between the death of Henry V and the actions of the remaining nobility. This connection was then emphasized through Gloucester reading the will, as it denied the authority of Henry's voice. The will was no longer a solemn charge but a potential tool used by Gloucester to confirm self-interested power. Gloucester effectively crowned himself king during Henry VI's minority and did it by speaking as the king's voice.

Furthermore, slight differences between *The Wars of the Roses* and *Rose Rage* in the will's third passage, the division of responsibility, signaled a divergence in the productions' respective concerns. Compare:

I will that my brother Humphrey shall be Protector of England during the minority of my child and that my brother Bedford, with the Duke of Burgundy, shall rule and be regent of our Realm of France commanding him with fire and sword to persecute Charles, calling

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<sup>122</sup> Barton and P. Hall, 3; Hampton-Reeves and Rutter, 60.

<sup>123</sup> Tatspaugh, 243.

himself Dauphin, to the intent either to bring him into obeisance, or to expel him out of our territories.

—*The Wars of the Roses*<sup>124</sup>

I will that my brother Humphrey shall be Protector of England during the minority of my child, and that my uncle of Exeter be ordered his special general. And I command Lord Talbot with fire and sword to persecute Charles, calling himself Dauphin, to expel him utterly from our realm of France.

—*Rose Rage*<sup>125</sup>

Peter Hall and Barton's use of the will divided power between Humphrey and Bedford, using the charge that Bedford "rule" France to establish the importance of the country to English interests and create a picture of England's political situation. Propeller's use of the same material replaced Bedford with Talbot. This decision was practical, as Bedford had been excised in the adaptation process to reduce the number of characters, but it also served in an interpretive capacity. Talbot represented the entire English occupation of France, so the importance of his later defeat was quickly established. The language referencing France was reduced, clarifying Talbot's commission. Finally, by connecting France with the absent Talbot, Propeller's version of Henry V's will minimized the international implications of Henry V's death and made the domestic power struggle of the English nobles paramount.

From the funeral of Henry V, *Rose Rage* immediately moved to the Temple Garden, where another group of factious nobles faced off over past grievances. Just as the opening scene clearly established the rivalry between Gloucester and Winchester, the Temple Garden scene introduced key players in the court and, through their plucking of the red and white roses, immediately identified each as either a Lancastrian (Somerset, Suffolk, Basset) or Yorkist (York, Warwick, Vernon). The order

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<sup>124</sup> Barton and P. Hall, 3.

<sup>125</sup> This text reflects that found in the prompt copy, which is the most accurate record of the text in performance. In the published play text, the phrase "that my uncle Exeter be ordered his special general" is omitted. Propeller, *Rose Rage* prompt book, care of Caro McKay (Broadway, UK) 8; E. Hall and Warren, *Rose Rage*, 13.

of the scenes was achieved by skipping over almost the entirety of Talbot's French campaign and reinforcing the production's focus on England's domestic troubles. The reduction of the French material to only three extant scenes in *Rose Rage* — Talbot's death, Suffolk's wooing of Margaret, and Warwick's failed negotiations for the Lady Bona — was the largest textual change in the adaptive process, and one that drew criticism from those who view the *Henry VI* plays as primarily political. In a review that neatly touches upon both the positive and negative traits of the adaptation, Susannah Clapp wrote:

The director's chop vanquishes the criticism of Shakespeare's History Plays as impossible-to-follow, dry-as-dust genealogies [...]. Here everyone can see, sometimes for the first time, who's who. The vision is consistent and urgent. But it's achieved at a cost. The timescale of the trilogy is so contracted that the idea of grudge-encrusted dynasties is diminished. There's more butchery than plotting: it begins to look as if everyone is driven by blood lust rather than political power. You see more anger than grief, more wounds than pain. The result is more frightening than grave.<sup>126</sup>

Clapp was not the only one to take this stance. John Gross' review similarly highlighted the production's clarity of purpose while simultaneously criticizing its single-minded focus:

We are made to feel, as in no other play I have seen, the full horror of the events being portrayed. But the play as a whole is reduced in the process. There is little sense of the future of the kingdom being at stake, or of the importance of such issues as legitimacy and usurpation. The only pattern is that of a ceaseless round of gang warfare.<sup>127</sup>

Their voices were joined by others. Michael Billington felt, in adapting *Henry VI* to create *Rose Rage*, "Hall and his co-adaptor Roger Warren not only sacrifice much that is textually vital but turn back the theatrical clock," going against the interpretations

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<sup>126</sup> Susannah Clapp, "Don't open the Bolly just yet," *The Observer*, 23 June 2002, <http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2002/jun/23/artsfeatures>, accessed 27 May 2015.

<sup>127</sup> John Gross, "Rose Rage," *Sunday Telegraph*, *Rose Rage* review pack 2002, personal collection of Tony Bell. Though most criticism centered around the loss of the nuances of politics, Michael Dobson found the script "deadeningly heavy with exposition" Michael Dobson, "Shakespeare Performances in England, 2002," *Shakespeare Survey* 56 (2003), 279.

by Terry Hands and Michael Boyd which focused on the plays' concern with "nationhood, politics and time."<sup>128</sup> Maxwell Cooter complained that "[b]y making so many cuts, *Rose Rage* presents rather a potted history and you miss the more measured descent into the horrors of war."<sup>129</sup> In all of these reviews, there is a fleeting sense of dissatisfaction with *Rose Rage*, as if the productions failed to realize something inherent in the texts which other productions had recognized.

A strong, clear, directorial concept does not necessarily translate into a successful production or interpretation. However, such criticism identifies the fault of *Rose Rage* not in its product but in the distance it creates between the plays in performance and an established critical interpretation of their thematic content. Clapp's assessment affirms the achievement of Hall and Warren in realizing their specific goals: clarity of characters and relationship, a directorial shape that is "consistent and urgent," and, most importantly, the portrayal of a world where "everyone is driven by blood lust rather than political power."<sup>130</sup> The last point is viewed as a failing not because taking such an approach is wrong, but because doing so is to interpret the plays in a way that rejects their value as contained within their political content, part of *The Wars of the Roses*' legacy. There is much to be mined from such an interpretation, but Hall intended that Propeller would re-interpret the plays as opposed to re-visiting past productions. Hall set out to "make [Shakespeare] speak in the present tense," boiling Propeller's motto down to "if it has been done before, don't do it again."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Michael Billington, "A needlessly savage Henry VI," *The Guardian*, 17 June 2002, 16.

<sup>129</sup> Maxwell Cooter, "Rose Rage (Part II)," *WhatsOnStage.com*, 17 June 2002, [http://www.whatsonstage.com/west-end-theatre/reviews/06-2002/rose-rage-part-ii\\_27570.html](http://www.whatsonstage.com/west-end-theatre/reviews/06-2002/rose-rage-part-ii_27570.html), accessed 27 May 2015.

<sup>130</sup> Clapp.

<sup>131</sup> E. Hall, "Guns and roses."

*Rose Rage*'s clarity and narrow focus were born from Hall and Warren's concern for their audience's ability to follow, enjoy, and respond to Shakespeare's works, engaging a variety of modern audiences through illustrating the blood lust that spirals into civil war. The discussion of *Rose Rage*'s opening moments illustrated how the production created a framework to explore such specific themes. Another moment, Cade's rebellion, offers greater detail of how the production sought to present the material in contemporary forms and connect with its audiences.

Cade's rebellion does not occur in Shakespeare's plays until Act Four of *King Henry VI Part II*, but it formed the driving action of the second half of *Rose Rage Part I*. The interval for *Rose Rage Part I* took place immediately following Gloucester's arrest, and the second half opened with his strangulation, followed swiftly by the deaths of Suffolk and Winchester. The tensions that had been building over the course of the production's first half now began to manifest in the deaths of England's ruling class, depicted through the onstage mutilation of cabbages and offal by the choric butchers. Cade's rebellion came on the heels of this escalation of violence and marked the tipping point from the in-fighting of political leaders into an eruption of national violence.

The emphasis on Cade in *Rose Rage* was another instance where Hall's production distanced itself from his father's, as Cade in *The Wars of the Roses* primarily functioned as a pawn in Warwick's plan to overthrow Henry VI.<sup>132</sup> In *Rose Rage*, the character was given greater autonomy, and he served as a clear corollary to the main action of the nobles. As a set piece within *Rose Rage Part I*, Cade's rebellion encapsulated Hall's goals of theme, clarity, and audience connection. It was also an example of how the composition of the acting company influenced Hall's direction

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<sup>132</sup> Hampton-Reeves and Rutter, 68-70.

and interpretive choices. Actor Tony Bell had been with the company since 1997 and, by the time of *Rose Rage*, had established a role within the company as a kind of master of ceremonies for each production. His previous Propeller role, Feste in the 1999 production of *Twelfth Night*, was an example of Bell “playing directly to the sympathies of the audience,” demonstrating his confidence with audience interaction.<sup>133</sup> Hall saw the potential to cast Bell as Cade and turn the scene into a political rally, “the moment the commoners invaded the courts,” and prevented Warren from cutting the role during the script’s adaptation process.<sup>134</sup> The decision to not only retain Cade’s lines but also to make it a major production moment was based upon the faith Hall had in a particular actor and speaks to the relationship between performer/play text as it pertains to Propeller. Knowing the capability of his actor, Hall used that knowledge to influence how he conceived the production — a production whose foundation text was chosen, in part, because of its natural reflection of the young, physical acting company. The interconnectedness of actor and script bears resemblances to how the plays were originally conceived, as “Shakespeare was not writing plays for posterity, but texts for performance by people he knew well. He relied on their competence, composed towards their capacity, and where there was egregious talent, he wrote for that, too,” with scripts cut and adapted to fit the talents and personnel of the acting company.<sup>135</sup> As a result of this casting process, Bell found the process of rehearsing Cade “really easy to tap into because Edward was using me, the actor, to create the role. He knew me inside out so he knew that he had to just keep me focused on the truth of it all.”<sup>136</sup> Bell’s comment shows not only an actor

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<sup>133</sup> Giles Woodforde, “Wit making true passion,” *The Oxford Time Weekend*, 21 May 1999, 19.

<sup>134</sup> Bell, personal interview.

<sup>135</sup> Peter Thomson, “The comic actor and Shakespeare,” in *Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage*, ed. Gary Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 140. See also: Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642*, 4th edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 127.

<sup>136</sup> Bell, personal interview.

collaborating with a director to create a character around an actor's particular style but also observes how Hall's intimate knowledge of the people he works with — supported by the consistency created through the first-refusal casting policy — allows him to tailor his directing style according to what is required from each actor.

Cade's rebellion was used to include and implicate spectators in the action onstage, encouraging their sympathies with humor before conducting acts of extreme violence. Bell entered from the audience to the rhythm of a snare drum, which steadily built in pace and volume through his delivery of a rap that broke from Shakespeare's text:

*Down with the government  
Down with the gentry  
They lost our land  
And left the coffers empty*

*Orlean and Paris  
Anjou and Mains  
They sold us down the river  
And the government's to blame*

*Reformation, reclaim the nation  
Reformation, no taxation*

*It's open season for treachery and treason  
Up go the taxes. Never give a reason  
Don't let the noblemen bleed the country dry  
Long live the commoners, hear the battle cry...*<sup>137</sup>

Written by Bell, the rap consciously quoted certain words from script ("reformation,"

"Orleans," "coffers") and aped the iambic pentameter of the verse, not unlike

Barton's technique when creating additional lines for *The Wars of the Roses*.<sup>138</sup> However,

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<sup>137</sup> Tatspaugh, 246; Tony Bell, "'Down with the government!': The Rise and Fall of Jack Cade," *Shakespeare in Action* education pack (The Watermill Theatre, 2001), np. The rap continued with cries of "Long live Jack Cade!" and was then repeated with individual rebels reciting the lines as well an additional verse: "There's a maggot in the apple / Corruption at the top / And it's rotten to the core / We've got to stop the rot." *Rose Rage* prompt book, 48a.

<sup>138</sup> Bell, personal interview.



the sudden inclusion of modern text was a sharp contrast to Barton's interpolated text, which was written to seamlessly integrate with Shakespeare's words.<sup>139</sup> Stephen Purcell describes another instance of attempts to popularize Shakespeare by de-emphasizing the plays' association with cultural elitism. According to Purcell, such moments "disrupt the patterns of spectatorship commonly associated with Shakespearean performance and force the audience into a playful reassessment of their relationship with the text."<sup>140</sup> However, the use of repetition and Bell's line delivery — which channelled the "tuneless" rhythm of "terrorist chanting" — consciously broke from the performance style up until that point.<sup>141</sup> The appropriation of Shakespearean components to create text in a modern vernacular challenges perceptions of Shakespeare as inherently indecipherable and outdated by highlighting its similarities to a more familiar example of stylized language. It also recaptures some of what Hall views as Shakespeare's original cultural position as a playwright with mass appeal.

The use of rap to outline the class divide between commoners and nobility connected the concerns of an Elizabethan play to the troubling economics of the twenty-first century, equating Cade's mob to modern disenfranchised groups. Beyond making Cade's mob recognizable to the spectators in the audience, Cade's rebellion was staged so that spectators were physically implicated in the action. By entering through the auditorium before taking his place center stage, Bell displayed Cade's rise to power as occurring when an individual crosses the threshold between spectator and performer, subtly implying that any individual sitting in the theatre likewise held the power to inspire others to violence. Having established this potential, Bell's

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<sup>139</sup> Pearson, 16.

<sup>140</sup> Stephen Purcell, *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* (Basingstoke: Palsgrave, 2009), 24.

<sup>141</sup> Bell, personal interview.

performance as Cade then revealed the danger inherent in allowing violence to blossom unchecked when actors began scouring the audience for sacrifices to the cause. After declaring “First thing we do, let’s kill all the lawyers!” Bell led a dragnet of the audience, and his careful questioning of spectators to identify his prey brought the threat of violence in close proximity to the audience.<sup>142</sup> Though the presence of the cast in the auditorium was brief, it illustrated the dangers inherent in any assumption that violence can be contained. The audience’s assumed safety “outside” the circle of butchery was challenged.

Bell’s delivery of Cade’s text similarly played with audience relationships. Bell’s performance oscillated between calm composure and frenzied rage, as he strove to create “a good cop/bad cop routine with the schizophrenic Cade in both roles.”<sup>143</sup> Bell’s description of the role is indicative of Propeller using contemporary touchstones to communicate the text, the “good cop/bad cop” term referring to a common relationship played out in television crime serials. Meanwhile, the seeming spontaneity of the rap within the structured Shakespeare text drew on the role of the fool or clown in the Elizabethan playhouse. His consistent use of direct address was akin to the Elizabethan fool who was, at times, “supposed to entertain the audience through his skills at extemporization.”<sup>144</sup> Bell has frequently performed roles which include improvised audience banter and his authorship of the rap places him in control of his own play script in a manner not unlike the improvisation of the Elizabethan clown.<sup>145</sup> The staging of Cade’s rebellion and its use of Bell’s rap exemplifies how the clown role provides opportunities for interpolated text to become “at once a continuation of

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<sup>142</sup> This staging was similar to Michael Boyd’s 2000 RSC production. Purcell, 57-58.

<sup>143</sup> Bell, “Down with the government!”

<sup>144</sup> Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 103. See also: Purcell, 74-75; Thomson, 142.

<sup>145</sup> Gurr, 129; John H. Astington, *Actors and Acting in Shakespeare’s Time: The Art of Stage Playing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 120-121.

and a separation from the Shakespeare tradition,” by rejecting the authority of the text in favor of pursuing authenticity in performance.<sup>146</sup> The use of rap displayed Hall’s intent in creating bridges between Elizabethan and modern sensibilities to aid narrative clarity, and Bell’s incorporation of Elizabethan clowning practices in his performance is but one way Hall encourages modern interpretations of traditional methods.

As with *Henry V*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *Twelfth Night*, *Rose Rage* toured internationally, bringing Propeller’s depiction of bloodshed to Wales, Ireland, Italy, Turkey, and Poland. The production also saw a West End transfer, playing at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in London for six weeks in 2002 and increasing the company’s public profile as the first Propeller production to be shown in London. *Rose Rage* was the company’s calling card and firmly established its presence within the landscape of Shakespearean performance. Propeller’s creation and particular approach to Shakespeare’s works is representative of the interests and philosophy of artistic director Edward Hall, and this chapter demonstrated how these interests influence the textual structure of Propeller’s productions. Though Hall’s influence is central to Propeller’s interpretation of Shakespeare’s works, his investment in creating an ensemble means that the input of the acting company, designers, and administrators are all incorporated in the production process. While Hall’s motivations in adapting *Rose Rage* were grounded in his desire to reclaim Shakespeare as a “populist” playwright, the strong directorial concept seemingly threatens to align Propeller’s productions with those that demonstrate the “authoritarian form of theatrical communication” Purcell references.<sup>147</sup> The following chapters show how the

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<sup>146</sup> Purcell, 51-52. Purcell goes on to observe, “Obscure clown sequences are all but impenetrable today precisely because they were at once immediate and topical for their audiences. Privileging a theatrical approach over a literary one, then, it could be argued that in fact the only way such sequences can be ‘faithfully’ performed is, paradoxically, in a departure from Shakespeare’s text.” 65.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

company counterbalances this threat through a collaborative rehearsal process and methods which emphasize the dual consciousness which is common to popular theatre.

*Rose Rage*'s strong concept was communicated to audiences not only through Hall and Warren's work on the text but also through its abattoir setting, which came through Hall's collaboration with designer Michael Pavelka. Like Hall, Pavelka draws on notions of audience inclusion, Elizabethan performance practice, and the primacy of the actor in conveying Shakespeare's stories to modern audiences. The next chapter will investigate Pavelka's role within Propeller's production process, following the development of his own design philosophy before examining how that design philosophy has created Propeller's unique production aesthetic.

## Chapter 2: Michael Pavelka and Propeller's Design

### Pavelka's Design Biography

For his exhibit at the 2013 World Stage Design Conference, Michael Pavelka displayed designs from Propeller's 2010 production of *Richard III*. Pieces that represented the look of the production were displayed under a simple heading that identified his name, exhibit number (074), and country (United Kingdom).<sup>1</sup> The first of the displayed pieces was a digital photo frame in which costume sketches scrolled past in groups of four. One such group consisted of a Nosferatu figure in a black frock coat holding what seemed to be a child upside-down by the ankle, a delicate feminine figure in a white skirt and button-down shirt, a faceless man in a large fur-collared coat, and a figure wearing an elaborate ensemble composed of dark, layered skirts and Victorian men's formalwear.<sup>2</sup> Below the costume sketches, a small model represented the set: metal gridwork framed the edges, strips of plastic hung from the top to form two separate curtains, miniature medical screens stood at the sides of the small box, and small, white human forms dotted the background, posed as if in mid-motion. Costumes sketches and set models were a large component of the exhibit, which brought together design work from over one hundred international designers to feature "the most innovative and ground breaking [*sic*] designs for performance around the world," but the last piece in Pavelka's display was a less conventional example of design work.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Pavelka, *So You Want to be a Theatre Designer?* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2015), 328.

<sup>2</sup> Pavelka variably identifies the era as "Victorian" and "Edwardian." Due to the presence of the bustle, which was popular during the mid-to-late 19th century, in his designs for *Richard III*, I have chosen to refer to the time-period as Victorian. "Richard III," Michael Pavelka website, accessed 23 June 2015, Michael Pavelka, "Making the Work of Play," in conversation with Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare Survey* 66 (2013), 141; Norah Waugh, *The Cut of Women's Clothes 1600-1930* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 143; R. Broby-Johansen, *An Illustrated History of Costume* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 197-198.

<sup>3</sup> "Exhibition," World Stage Design, <http://www.wsd2013.com/exhibition/>, accessed 30 June 2014.

Inside the confines of a large glass cylinder floated two, child-like mannequin heads, their blue eyes staring vacantly through a thick clear liquid. The heads were unexpected, simple, disturbing yet morbidly playful, and recognizable yet open to interpretation. Removed from its performance context, the jar of heads gestured towards *Richard III*'s atmosphere of black humor combined with Gothic horror. While the costume sketches had preserved space for the identity of performer in their faceless forms and the white figures peopling the model set acknowledged the presence of the actor in the scenic design, the heads showed a more dramatic symbol of design's kinetic potential by marking a specific intersection between design and performance. In Propeller's *Richard III*, the two princes had been represented by puppets, whose heads were duplicated within these jars. Separated from the rest of the puppets' forms, the heads ceased to be seen as part of living characters and instead symbolized those characters' deaths.

The heads serve as an example of how Pavelka interprets Propeller's non-illusionistic approach to Shakespeare's plays and foregrounds the role of the actor in creating performance. The heads, as part of a complete puppet, "performed" the roles of the young princes in accordance with the actors (Sam Swainsbury and Richard Frame, who, significantly, doubled as Clarence's murderers) who manipulated them. The puppets' design was something to be used in creating character onstage, a more extreme example of the relationship between costume and performer. The puppets were, in a sense, worn by the actors to project the image of the young princes, and whose performances were supplemented by the performers' movements and vocal deliveries of Shakespeare's text. The puppets distanced audiences from the princes, communicating the youth and innocence of the characters — the princes were physically manipulated by those around them, which provided a metaphor for the

ways in which the nobles were emotionally and intellectually manipulated by Richard — while eschewing any attempt to create real children onstage. The heads' reappearance in the jar triggered an emotional response based on the ways in which the other actors onstage interacted with them and, by triggering such responses from the performers, played an active role in production rather than serving as mere decoration.

Working with long-time collaborator and Propeller's director, Edward Hall, Pavelka approaches his design process for Propeller with a number of parameters already in hand. Sets must be flexible and able to be manipulated by the actors into different configurations without impeding the pace of performance. Sets must also be portable. Even when Propeller was co-produced by the Watermill Theatre in Newbury (from 1997 to 2005), it was, at its heart, a touring company. In 2010, two complete *Richard III/The Comedy of Errors* sets were built — one for UK/European travel and one for “long haul” travel to the United States of America — to facilitate touring, but the large number of domestic tour stops required a set that still honored the everything-in-the-hand-luggage philosophy of Propeller's poorer beginnings.<sup>4</sup> Finally, set designs must be dual-purpose. Since 2007, Propeller has toured two shows simultaneously, using a single scenic frame for both. Often Propeller will perform both shows on a single day, so the set must be easily deconstructed and re-built between the end of the matinee performance and the beginning of the evening performance. Similar considerations influence Pavelka's costume designs, which must be practical and allow the actors a range of motion in keeping with Propeller's highly physical performance style. Costumes must communicate the distinctions between the two or

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Pavelka, personal interview, London, 1 May 2014; Jasper Rees, “Shakespeare in a suitcase,” *The Telegraph*, 8 January 2007, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/3662435/Shakespeare-in-a-suitcase.html>, accessed 24 April 2014. For the 2011 *Henry V/The Winter's Tale* tour, three sets were built, one each in England, Hong Kong, and Australia. Nick Asbury, personal interview, Stratford-upon-Avon, 20 September 2013.

three named characters an actor may play within the course of performance, as well as establish his choric identity. Moreover, Pavelka designs for known male bodies, as Propeller is a single-sex acting company, so the costumes not only signify a change in character but also changes in gender. Over the course of Propeller's history, these factors have guided Pavelka in developing a recognizable design aesthetic for the company.

Chapter 1 outlined Edward Hall's directorial approach to Shakespeare's plays and the ways in which he interprets the texts. This chapter investigates how Michael Pavelka works with both Hall and the acting company to translate these interpretations into visual signifiers that communicate information to modern audiences, presenting Shakespeare's plays as exercises in collective storytelling. I begin with Pavelka's biography, which is followed by a broad exploration of Shakespearean design so as to contextualize Pavelka's use and/or rejection of aesthetic traditions. This first section then more closely examines Pavelka's employment of "frameworks" to create kinetic designs that encourage engagement from both performers and audience members.<sup>5</sup> This section also introduces Pavelka's highly collaborative working process, beginning with his relationship with directors Ted Craig and Hall before moving on to his relationship with the acting company in the subsequent two sections. These latter sections focus on Pavelka's scenic and costume designs, respectively, playing particular attention to his work for Propeller's 2010/1 tour of *Richard III* and *The Comedy of Errors*. In both set and costume, Pavelka finds ways of giving actors increased control of their surroundings and resisting illusion in favor of inviting audience members into the theatre-making process by exposing the mechanics of the production. In turn, this approach results in designs that shift the treatment of

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<sup>5</sup> Pavelka, "Making the Work of Play," 135.



Shakespeare's plays as realistic drama to one that presents them as communal stories which are told through the efforts of performer and spectator alike.

Having participated in amateur dramatics in school and completed his A-levels in art and geometrical and engineering drawing, Pavelka attended Wimbledon School of Design from 1979 to 1981.<sup>6</sup> There he studied under Richard Negri, a strong proponent of collaborative relationships between director and designer. Negri himself trained at the Old Vic School, an organization that consistently emphasized theatrical creation as a group effort, and Negri's ability to work effectively with a producer was noted in his final report upon graduating.<sup>7</sup> As described by one of his former pupils at Wimbledon, Negri felt "a good design will only work for a particular production of a particular play [...] where the distinction between directorial idea and design idea is indivisible."<sup>8</sup> Such an attitude finds itself echoed in Pavelka's own approach towards theatrical collaboration, as he describes his role as designer as "work[ing] closely with the director to co-create a vision for a theatre production" and defines a designer's art as "mak[ing] a powerful addition to the collective artistic endeavor."<sup>9</sup> Pavelka's reference to "co-creation" presents director and designer as equals in developing an interpretive approach to a production rather than positioning the designer as mere translator of the director's ideas into visual terms.

Before Propeller, Pavelka's most consistent early collaborator was Ted Craig, the artistic director of the Croydon Warehouse, a 100-seat adaptable theatre in London that focused on new writing.<sup>10</sup> The venue, like the Watermill Theatre, offered

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<sup>6</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.

<sup>7</sup> Michel St. Denis, "Advanced Course Report," in *Work as a designer*, Richard Negri website, <http://www.richardnegri.co.uk/final%20report.htm>, accessed 24 April 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in David Burrows, *The Life and Work of Richard Negri* (Sidcup: Society of British Theatre Designers, 2013), 185.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Pavelka, "Collaboration," Michael Pavelka website, accessed December 29, 2013. Page has since been removed. Pavelka, *So You Want to be a Theatre Designer?*, 77-78.

<sup>10</sup> Warehouse Phoenix, "History of the Theatre 1977-2015," Warehouse Phoenix, <http://www.warehousephoenix.co.uk/history.html>, accessed 7 July 2015.

a stage with a flexible configuration, and each production afforded Pavelka the opportunity to design not only the scenic components but also the type of auditorium best suited for the particular play, all the while keeping within the Warehouse's small budgets.<sup>11</sup> Pavelka's designs for the Warehouse ranged from impressionistic sets, such as the design for *Conversations with George Sandburgh...* (dir. Richard Osborne, 1990) that "link[ed] the play's two locations by bleeding the house's brown-and-white color scheme into the airstrip" and the crates used for of *Fairy Tales of New York* (dir. Ted Craig, 1991) that "ingeniously evoke[d] Manhattan's concrete canyons," to a "sumptuously realistic" country home (*The Fishing Trip*, dir. Lindsay Anderson, 1991).<sup>12</sup> Regardless of method, the constant theme of reviews from this period is the way in which Pavelka, often in conjunction with Craig's direction, was able to create space on a small stage: "Craig and designer Michael Pavelka also manage to convey a sense of theatrical artifice in a pocket-handkerchief space;" "Michael Pavelka's set dominates the wide Warehouse stage and powerfully maintains an overbearing sense of the city in this neglected place;" "In a tiny space, director Ted Craig and designer Michael Pavelka achieve effects worthy of 'The Piano.'" <sup>13</sup> Here was the beginning of a working practice for Pavelka that would find itself recreated in his work with Propeller: an interest in exploring performance space, a steady working relationship with a director, and the creation of theatrical effects with limited materials.

This early approach brought Pavelka success, and by the time he first worked with Hall, Pavelka had already established a name for himself. He had two productions nominated by the Manchester Evening News for Best Design in 1992,

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<sup>11</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Billington, "Conversations with George Sandburgh...", *The Guardian* 28 June 1990, 28; Michael Billington, "Fairy Tales of New York," *The Guardian*, 4 May 1991, 21; Nicholas de Jongh, "The Fishing Trip," *The Guardian* 29 June 1991, 21.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Billington, "The Victoria line," *The Guardian* 30 October 1986, 14; John Vidal, "Beached," *The Guardian*, 16 March 1987, 11; Michael Billington, "THEATRE: Eva and the Cabin Boy," *The Guardian*, 18 June 1994, 30.

followed the next year by a Time Out awards nomination for *Fashion*, and he won the Manchester Evening News Best Design Award in 1996 for *The Life of Galileo*.<sup>14</sup> It was also in 1996 that Pavelka designed the set and costumes for the N. J. Crisp thriller *That Good Night*, directed by Hall. Though the flexibility of the Croydon space gave Pavelka ample opportunities for experimentation, he admits that his designs up until this point were “fundamentally more decorative than anything else” and were created in isolation according to a specific play’s needs without considering any possibility of a continuing design aesthetic.<sup>15</sup> *That Good Night* continued that trend and, though the production was successful, the design remained ornamental.<sup>16</sup> Pavelka was dissatisfied with the work, just as Hall felt his own *Othello* had delivered a production that was safe and, at the same time, expected. The mutual dissatisfaction experienced by Hall and Pavelka drew them into conversation about what they might be doing instead and the kind of work they hoped to create, and these discussions led them to *Henry V*.<sup>17</sup>

For Hall, the Watermill provided an intimate theatre space where he could experiment with creating an “event” that would be comparable to the Elizabethan playgoing experience.<sup>18</sup> He came to the idea of *Henry V* with an interest in foregrounding the actor and forging an engaged relationship between performer and spectator. Hall’s pursuit of these goals complemented Pavelka’s expanded exploration of space. Whereas previously Pavelka’s designs were concerned primarily with the

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<sup>14</sup> “Awards and Nominations,” Michael Pavelka website, <http://www.michaelpavelka.com/awards/>, accessed 7 July 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.

<sup>16</sup> The only extant review for the production available on the internet is a mis-attributed quote on the play’s Wikipedia page which praises the production and compares Pavelka’s set to the lavish spectacles once connected to the HM Tennent producing house. Though unreliable, this description is supported by Pavelka’s own description of his approach to the play, which takes place in an Italian villa, as “naturalistic.” Available newspaper reviews do not give a description of the set but do refer to it as “beautifully crafted” and indicate the presence of live trees as part of the scenic design. “That Good Night,” [wikipedia.org](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/That_Good_Night), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/That\\_Good\\_Night](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/That_Good_Night), accessed 7 July 2015. Pavelka, personal interview; Richard Rhyddach, “Sinden is play’s one saving grace,” *Surrey Advertiser*, 5 April 1996; Sarah Evans, “Cast shines in a ‘soul-searcher’,” *West Sussex County Times*, 12 April 1996, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.

<sup>18</sup> “Edward Hall on Propeller’s *Henry V* and *The Winter’s Tale*,” WhatsOnStage, 8 January 2015, <http://www.whatsonstage.com>, accessed 20 April 2013.

specifics of each production, Propeller's early days saw Pavelka moving towards a broader exploration of the theatrical process as a whole, supported by Hall's view of theatre as make-believe. Pavelka's creation of sets that highlight the performance of Shakespeare's plays as collaborative story-telling philosophically aligns him with Hall, allowing for close collaboration between the two in creating Propeller's production worlds as well as illustrating Pavelka's evolving attitude towards design's function in performance.

Contextualizing Pavelka's development of an aesthetic for Propeller leads to two sets of polarized views regarding design: the tension between spectacle and simplicity within theatre as a whole and competing views regarding authentic design for Shakespearean performance, specifically. During the 1980s, subsidy levels in England failed to keep pace with inflation, leaving those companies that received state funding in a curious position of having to prove their bankable commercial appeal in order to obtain the financial support that should have granted a certain level of independence from box office earnings.<sup>19</sup> Regional theatres suffered summer closures as a result of the increasing financial strain, which resulted in the re-consolidated theatrical activity within London — largely catering to tourist audiences seeking escapism and spectacle.<sup>20</sup> It was the decade of the Phantom's chandelier, the army helicopter, and the fall of the Parisian students' barricade — flashy moments of awe-inspiring stagecraft set to hummable scores that could be purchased along with t-shirts and keychains at the kiosk in the lobby.<sup>21</sup> It was also the decade that saw the emergence of companies such as Cheek by Jowl, Théâtre de Complicité, and the

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<sup>19</sup> D. Keith Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre: British Theatre and Drama in the Eighties* (London: Greenwood Press, 1999), 34-52; Michael Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945* (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 2007), 318-321.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Billington, *One Night Stands: A Critic's View of British Theatre from 1971-1991* (London: Nick Hern Books Ltd., 1993), 178, 207.

<sup>21</sup> Maria Björnson, des., *The Phantom of the Opera*, 1986; John Napier, des., "Miss Saigon," 1989; John Napier, des., "Les Misérables," 1985.

English Shakespeare Company which rejected the spectacle displayed in mainstream theatre and instead presented productions with simple, abstract scenic designs.<sup>22</sup>

At the same time that Pavelka was developing his designs for Propeller within theatrical trends torn between spectacle and simplicity, he was also negotiating traditions of “authentic” Shakespearean performance design. I will be exploring ideas of authenticity in more depth regarding scenic and costume design in their corresponding sections, but such questions also influenced, and continue to influence, Pavelka’s overall approach and corresponded with Hall’s interest in authentic experience rather than authentic production. For Hall, the question of authenticity revolves around the text, deriving either from the printed text or from the author’s supposed intent. Shakespeare’s play-texts exist in many permutations and are subject to editorial influence, yet they provide a material constant for comparison — a baseline against which changes can be measured. Ideas of authorial intent have no such tangible mark of comparison, based, as they are, on each director’s individual interpretation of a particular play’s content.

Like Hall, Pavelka inherits two schools of thought regarding “authenticity” as it applies to the visualization of Shakespeare in production.<sup>23</sup> Throughout the Victorian era, pictorial realism dominated Shakespeare performances. Embodied by the work of such actor-managers as Henry Irving and Herbert Beerbohm Tree — the latter’s stage representation of an Athenian forest famously included live rabbits — pictorial authenticity strove to recreate the specific locations of Shakespeare’s plays in lavish detail.<sup>24</sup> These productions prioritized realizing the historic time period of

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945* (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 2007), 319.

<sup>23</sup> For more on directorial authenticity, see chapter 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ralph Berry, “The Aesthetics of Beerbohm Trees Shakespeare Festivals,” *Nineteenth Century Theatre Research* 9, no. 1 (1981), 44-45; Dennis Kennedy, *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth-Century Performance*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 27-32, 68.

Shakespeare's narrative — the classical world of Caesar's Rome or Macbeth's medieval Scotland — over adhering to any specific version of Shakespeare's text, which was consequently cut and adapted to allow for elaborate scene changes.<sup>25</sup> Historical research combined with an understanding of real-world locations such as forests and medieval cities means that designers had a starting point they could then build off of for the purposes of the production. At the turn of the twentieth century, about the same time that pictorial realism was enjoying the height of its popularity, William Poel began experimenting with another kind of performance style that sought to realize his own interpretation of "authentic" stage conditions. Eschewing elaborate sets for painted backdrops, utilizing Elizabethan-style costumes, and experimenting with the proscenium to move closer to the stage shape of the Elizabethan playhouse, Poel's work allowed for a swifter performance pace than that of his more detail-driven contemporaries.<sup>26</sup> Poel's approach sought to recapture the conditions of Elizabethan performance, which, similar to the ephemeral notion of authorial intent, is more indicative of how a producer or designer interprets the known information regarding early modern theatre than of universally accepted, concrete knowledge.

These two contrasting approaches of the nineteenth century — pictorial realism according to specifics of the play's narrative compared to the quest to resurrect original performance conditions — provide the polar boundaries of Shakespearean scenography in the twenty-first century but, in doing so, create a vast spectrum of approaches that can be used to understand designers' work. *Hamlet* now no longer requires a medieval Danish castle but can be set in any number of locations according to the production's thematic interests. Though productions became more

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<sup>25</sup> Kennedy, 32.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 37-40.

liberal with temporal and geographical settings for Shakespeare's plays, they will often include detailed sets or set dressings in the spirit of Victorian pictorial realism. Meanwhile, Motley's New Stagecraft, which gave preference to pacing and fluidity over pictorial detail, was a variation on Poel's bare-stage experiments and subsequently paved the way for the simple, unspecific sets and costumes favored by such companies as Cheek by Jowl and Northern Broadsides.

Pavelka's work with Propeller favors the latter approach, focusing on scenic designs that allow for continuous action. However, unlike Poel, Pavelka prioritizes communication with modern audiences over faithful re-creations of original stage conditions, returning to Hall's view of traditional methods as a valuable starting point for developing an interpretation of authentic experience rather than pursuing historical accuracy. There is a clear correlation between Pavelka and his interest in this method of cultural translation and Negri who believed in the use of visual components to signal and guide audiences through Shakespeare's texts. Negri said:

Shakespeare was the most balanced dramatist who ever lived: but he was writing for an Elizabethan audience which could draw on the whole body of conventions and traditions he shared with them. For full enjoyment and satisfaction, later audiences need a production which adjusts the balance for their age, which is tuned to their sensibilities, and which fills out deficiencies in those sensibilities.<sup>27</sup>

Negri's description references "a body of conventions and traditions" that influenced the plays' original receptions. To adequately "adjust the balance," one must first decide what meanings those traditions carry with them and which aspects of Shakespeare's plays it is most important to reconstitute for modern understanding.

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Burrows, 88-89.

Pavelka's attitude towards Shakespeare's plays is reflective of Hall's interpretations of the plays as Shakespeare's "dreamscapes."<sup>28</sup> Pavelka's job is to turn such dreamscapes into a recognizable, yet non-realistic, performance world. To achieve this effect, Pavelka's designs for Propeller do not adhere to any specific locality but are representative of a type of environment that communicates the themes each production is meant to highlight. Pavelka specifically cites the idea of "magical realism" when describing his process for designing the contrasting worlds of Bohemia and Sicilia for Propeller's *The Winter's Tale* (2005, 2012): "'Real' they are not, but equally, both have to be recognisable."<sup>29</sup> "Magical realism" is also indicative of his broader design aesthetic for Propeller. It is a term used mainly to describe movements in art and literature, but its concern with the intersection between reality and the supernatural is applicable to Shakespeare's plays as well. In *The Winter's Tale*, the realistic concerns of rulers and marriages co-exist with the presence of oracles, visions, and magic. Likewise, in *Richard III*, the coldly calculating nobles experience visions, prophecies, and ghosts. Pavelka must create worlds where the supernatural can be accepted as matter-of-fact and coincide with more realistic events without explanation.<sup>30</sup> Oftentimes, the supernatural is embodied by the choric presence. In the case of *Richard III*, Pavelka's designs needed to interact with both the named characters and the choric orderlies in order to create a world where interactions between the two could continuously cross the boundaries between the English court and the otherworldly realm surrounding it.

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<sup>28</sup> Tim Fitzsimons, "The Winter's Tale: High tragedy and comedy," *Stuff*, 1 March 2012, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/arts/6501091/The-Winters-Tale-High-tragedy-and-comedy>, accessed 24 April 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Pavelka, "Designing *The Winter's Tale*," in *Propeller Shakespeare: The Winter's Tale*, ed. Edward Hall and Roger Warren (London: Oberon Books, 2012), 14.

<sup>30</sup> This use of magical realism adheres to William Spindler's definition of ontological magic realism: "[T]he supernatural is presented in a matter-of-fact way as if it did not contradict reason, and no explanations are offered for the unreal events in the text. There is no reference to the mythical imagination of pre-industrial communities." William Spindler, "Magic Realism: A Typography," *Forum for Modern Studies* 24, no. 1 (1993), 82.



Pavelka frequently refers to his design as a “tool kit” and Edward Hall characterizes it as a “playground.”<sup>31</sup> These metaphors carry with them connotations of both construction and childlike play and recall tools used to build worlds both concrete and imaginary. This practice represents a fundamental shift away from Pavelka’s early understanding of design as simply framing the actors’ performances and as something that “wouldn’t be an integral part of [the performances] or much less actually motivate what might go on in the rehearsal room.”<sup>32</sup> Pavelka’s “toolkits” identify the conceptual framework for the production, such as the abattoir of *Rose Rage* and *Richard III*’s Victorian psych ward, and these frameworks are developed in conversation with Hall. Pavelka and Hall’s collaboration will be discussed in greater detail below, but their joint preference for using cultural touchstones as “a way of bonding with the audience through referencing common experience[s]” illustrates how Pavelka addresses the requirement identified by Negri to “adjust the balance” between Elizabethan cultural tradition and modern sensibilities.<sup>33</sup> References can be cinematic (*Richard III*’s almost comical bloodshed recalled Hammer horror films), televisual (*The Merchant of Venice* was set in an “Oz”-like prison), cultural (*The Winter’s Tale* Bohemian sheep-shearing festival was a version of Glastonbury), or theatrical (Pavelka’s Victorian attic for Propeller’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream* drew inspiration from Sally Jacob’s white-box set for Peter Brook’s production of the same).<sup>34</sup> Fellini,

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Pavelka, “Designing with a Propelling Pencil”, *Richard III* program (Coventry: Belgrade Theatre, 2007), np.; Michael Pavelka, “Designing *Henry V*,” *Henry V* program (Milton Keynes: Milton Keynes Theatre, 2011), np.; Edward Hall characterizes Pavelka’s design as a “playground.” Quoted in *Pocket Dream* education pack (Broadway: Propeller, 2009), 17.

<sup>32</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.

<sup>33</sup> Pavelka, “Making the Work of Play,” 130.

<sup>34</sup> Andrew Dickson, “Edward Hall: Chainsaws and pickled princes,” *The Guardian*, 18 January 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/jan/18/edward-hall-propeller-hampstead-theatre>, accessed 24 April 2014; Michael Pavelka, “The Merchant of Venice,” Michael Pavelka website, 2015, <http://www.michaelpavelka.com/research/research-excellence-framework/the-merchant-of-venice/>, accessed 24 April 2014; Gunnar Cauthery, “Music in *The Winter’s Tale*,” in *Propeller Shakespeare: The Winter’s Tale*, eds. Edward Hall and Roger Warren (London: Oberon Books, 2012), 16; Michael Pavelka, “*A Midsummer’s Night Dream*,” Michael Pavelka website, <http://www.michaelpavelka.com/research/research-excellence-framework/a-midsummer-nights-dream/>, accessed 24 April 2014. For cinematic references in *Rose Rage*, see Tatspaugh, 243-244.

Lamborghini, Jacques Tati, the New York Dolls, “football shirts, sombreros, smiley-face T-shirts [...] Dame Edna spectacles, [and] Maggie Thatcher handbags” are all only some of the visual references Pavelka has used in creating Propeller’s eclectic design aesthetic.<sup>35</sup> Pavelka often combines a variety of inspirations within a production according to the needs of a particular moment or character. In this way, a production’s coherence comes from the way such disparate elements are used to tell Propeller’s own version of Shakespeare’s story.

The reliance on recognizable cultural touchstones serves to make characters, locations, and situations immediately relatable to modern audiences and complements Hall’s treatment of Shakespeare as a popular playwright able to reach a wide variety of demographics. It also frames Pavelka’s visual aesthetic as exemplifying Purcell’s assertion that “Shakespearean theatre does not exist in a vacuum, but is part of a spectrum of a related and interconnecting cultural areas, from stand-up comedy and sitcom to advertising, blockbuster films, and television sci-fi.”<sup>36</sup> Pavelka’s designs situate Propeller’s production worlds on a broader spectrum than those designs that create realistic, highly-detailed worlds that present Shakespeare’s plays as hermetically sealed within a specific cultural or historical context. Instead, Pavelka acknowledges how Shakespeare is appropriated, absorbed, and replicated within British culture. Pavelka’s inclusion of cultural references in his designs not only provides him with another store of images and associations from which to draw, but also reminds habitual theatre-goers that the plays they are seeing are part of an interconnected performance tradition. These references may be more specialized than, say, the use of football shirts or prison blues but nonetheless contribute to how Pavelka’s designs

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<sup>35</sup> Michael Pavelka, “Drawing Time,” *The Winter’s Tale* program (Newbury: The Watermill Theatre, 2005), np.; Michael Pavelka, “Designing *The Taming of the Shrew*,” in *Propeller Shakespeare: The Taming of the Shrew*, ed. Edward Hall and Roger Warren (London: Oberon Books, 2013), 14; Pavelka, “Making the Work of Play” 132.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen Purcell, *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), 5.

operate on a number of simultaneous levels that provide numerous types of visual information to spectators. These layered meanings operate within a cohesive framework but still allow a range of individual interpretations depending on the personal knowledge of the spectator.

These different factors result in Pavelka producing non-realistic designs for Propeller which are built around “objects in the space that help us to remind the audience that Shakespeare is dealing with ideas first, and immersion second.”<sup>37</sup> “Immersive theatre” is a term that is frequently applied to theatrical experiences in which the spectator is, in some way, placed within a production that “engages the whole body of the spectator participant, and creates an ambiguous situation whereby it is unclear whether the work is happening around, to, or within the spectator participant.”<sup>38</sup> Though immersive theatre is evidence of a different type of theatrical form than what Pavelka is referencing, the concept indicates what is meant by his use of “immersion”: the feeling that the spectator is inhabiting a fully realized world in which the story takes place. Pavelka never asks Propeller’s audiences to believe what they are watching is real but instead designs according to what ideas and themes he and Hall hope to highlight within the narrative. The audience’s attention is therefore directed to considering these ideas rather than losing themselves within the fictional world. This creates an active form of spectatorship as it necessitates the audience to interpret the production’s visual context according to how it is perceived to interact with the narrative action.

Furthermore, Pavelka’s use of “objects in space” results in scenic designs that are adaptable, composed of disparate pieces that the actors rearrange throughout the

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<sup>37</sup> Michael Pavelka, “Designing *Henry V*,” in *Propeller Shakespeare: Henry V*, eds. Edward Hall and Roger Warren (London: Oberon Books, 2012), 12.

<sup>38</sup> Gareth White, “On Immersive Theatre,” *Theatre Research International* 37, no. 3 (2012), 223.

course of a production. This approach has the added advantage of working with the actors rather than against them, as they are in control of their surroundings. The relationship between design and its interaction with performers is a reoccurring theme when practitioners discuss how design serves theatrical practice. It is central to designer Ralph Koltai's definition of the term, as he explains how the designer "has to create an envelope — provide an atmosphere — that serves the author, the director and focuses on the actor by letting him belong to the environment and the environment to him — *he* is the most important person of all."<sup>39</sup> When talking about design, Koltai identifies the actor as the most important figure to consider, and there is a close correlation between innovations in acting technique and those in theatre design. Stanislavsky's devoted realism required detailed sets depicting recognizable places, Brecht combined barebones scenic design with specific properties to support his alienation techniques, Grotowski identified the danger of design to turn theatre into a "monumental 'camera oscura [*sic*],' a thrilling 'laterna magica'" if it loses sight of the actor.<sup>40</sup> What this illustrates is the role of design as an active part of a theatrical production, able not only to communicate information about place, time, and tone to spectators but also able to impact the ways in which actors' performances are seen and understood. Pavelka understands this relationship, warning against "inappropriately distracting design [that] can be counterproductive to the quality of a complete theatrical experience" and identifying the designer's support of the actor as "crucial to the creative and collaborative practice of putting on a show."<sup>41</sup> To this end, his design

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<sup>39</sup> Ralph Koltai, "Theatre Design: The Exploration of Space," *Journal of the Royal Society of the Arts* 135, no. 5368 (March 1987), 302.

<sup>40</sup> David Richard Jones, *Great Directors at Work: Stanislavsky, Brecht, Kazan, Brook* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 73-74, 98. Jerzy Grotowski, "The Theatre's New Testament," in *Towards a Poor Theatre*, ed. Eugenio Barba (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1968), 30.

<sup>41</sup> Pavelka, *So You Want to be a Theatre Designer?*, 7, 100.

process is motivated by a “responsibility” he feels to the group and how he envisions “the design will support a particular group effort.”<sup>42</sup>

Pavelka speaks of his process as being motivated by the people it serves and its place in a larger production whole, interconnected with the components of theatrical performance. In Koltai’s definition, the designer is fashioned as the creator, responsible for creating design that then interacts with others. Koltai’s view was a break with the popular perception that design originated with the director; and, though the interaction speaks to collaboration insofar as the needs of other practitioners on a project are considered, the practical work of the designer in this definition is still consolidated within the individual.<sup>43</sup> His designs reflect this view as they tended towards large, structural pieces that provided ample playing space for the actors and often represented what he thought to be “a definitive way of exploiting the volume of the stage space.”<sup>44</sup> The simplicity of Koltai’s designs is reflected in Pavelka’s work, but Pavelka resists the idea of the designer creating his designs in isolation. In his writings regarding designs for *Propeller*, he continuously refers to “we” when discussing the origins of a setting: “We imagined the attic of that house and distorted its properties;” “In conceiving our unique world for the story, we had to find for ourselves an island community with its own laws and superstitions;” “We decided to turn Richard inside out.”<sup>45</sup> Pavelka does not identify to whom “we” refers. Ostensibly he is referencing Hall, with whom Pavelka develops the overall production concept,

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<sup>42</sup> Michael Pavelka, *Off the Wall*, part of the V&A exhibition “Transformation and Revelation,” Michael Pavelka website, <http://www.michaelpavelka.com/transformation-revelation-wall/>, accessed 31 March 2014.

<sup>43</sup> According to Koltai, the director “looks to the designer for inspiration which requires the designer to be part director himself.” Koltai, 302.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 306. For examples of Koltai’s designs, see Sylvia Backemeyer, ed., *Ralph Koltai: Designer for the Stage* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1997).

<sup>45</sup> Pavelka, “Designing a dream: The Play Room,” Michael Pavelka website, <http://www.michaelpavelka.com/designing-a-dream-the-play-room/>, accessed 24 April 2014; Michael Pavelka, “Designing *The Comedy of Errors*,” website, <http://www.michaelpavelka.com/designing-the-comedy-of-errors/>, accessed 24 April 2014; Michael Pavelka, “Designing *Richard III*,” Michael Pavelka website, <http://www.michaelpavelka.com/designing-richard-iii/>, accessed 24 April 2014.

but there is a feeling that Pavelka extends his view of the “designer” of a Propeller production to include the company at large. Such an interpretation is supported by Pavelka’s assertion that

collective authorship of a production is the philosophical premise of Propeller Theatre and critical to the integrity of the design process, discovering what an ensemble means for all of us: not only performers, but also a complete creative, technical and administrative team.<sup>46</sup>

Pavelka’s reference to “collective authorship” echoes Hall’s interest in actor “ownership,” illustrating how Pavelka and Hall view Propeller’s productions as the result of collaborative contribution. There is, therefore, no definitive application of the scenic designs and its function is defined by its usage by the actors. “Collective authorship” also distances Pavelka from a position as the design’s originator and begins to redefine his role within the company as editorial, using the work and suggestions of the people he works with to form a coherent design concept and framing his contribution as akin to Hall’s editorial directorial practice.

This introductory section has served to outline Pavelka’s broad design philosophy as it applies to Propeller’s productions. By collaborating with both Hall and the acting company as a whole, Pavelka creates impressionistic worlds that still retain recognizable visual signifiers to communicate meaning to modern audiences. Pavelka’s designs correspond with Hall’s view of Shakespeare as a popular playwright primarily interested in story-telling, which affects the way “authenticity” is interpreted through design. The following sections investigate how Pavelka develops his designs with the company, beginning first with his approach to crafting the scenic world of a Propeller production before moving on to examine the work that goes into creating the costumes. In both his scenic and costume designs, Pavelka uses recognizable

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<sup>46</sup> Pavelka, “Designing *The Winter’s Tale*,” 14.

materials to represent rather than recreate the world in which the narrative unfolds, simultaneously highlighting Propeller's theatrical creation and inviting the audience to imaginatively participate in the creative process.

## Scenic Design

2001's *Rose Rage* ended with Richard Clothier, as the malevolent Duke of Gloucester, breaking away from his triumphant brothers to address the audience: "Now is the winter of our discontent / made glorious summer by the son of York."<sup>47</sup> Blackout.

The inclusion of Richard III's opening lines and their sudden breaking off was a tantalizing promise of more to come. It would take nearly a decade before Propeller fulfilled that promise, previewing performances of *Richard III* in 2010. For the first time in the company's history, Propeller staged a show that consciously and purposefully drew from the company's past. Pavelka's designs had to satisfy the requirement of the play's particular needs, as dictated by the conceptual framework he and Hall would develop, but also needed to have a clear relationship with the *Rose Rage* abattoir. Practically, it would have to be compatible with the design for its touring partner, *The Comedy of Errors*. Finally, the design would also need to honor the requirements of Propeller's overall production aesthetic: a conceptual world which accounts for a choric presence, a fluid space which gives the acting company freedom and allows an energetic pace, and an environment that encourages audience engagement.

To illustrate how Pavelka considers Propeller's acting company and the audience experience when conceiving his scenic designs, I trace his design process

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<sup>47</sup> *Rose Rage* prompt book, 2001, care of Caro McKay (Broadway, UK), 123.

through three stages: storyboards, the maquette, and the digital rendering, comparing each phase to the set in performance. Storyboards allow Pavelka to conceptualize the arc of the production as a whole and how his scenic designs will function in the auditoria to which Propeller tours. The maquette, a three-dimensional miniature model of the set, gives Pavelka and Hall the opportunity to test ideas regarding the physicality of the designs before they are further experimented with by the actors in rehearsal. The digital rendering is a two-dimensional model, created on a computer, that offers insight into the audience's perspective and presents the look and texture of the materials Pavelka chooses. In addition to the *Richard III/Comedy of Errors* scenic designs, I also reference both the 1997 and 2011 *Henry V* and the 2005 and 2012 *The Winter's Tale* scenic designs to track the development of Propeller's design aesthetic and examine how Pavelka's scenic designs have evolved throughout the company's history.

Pavelka begins conceptualizing the scenic progression of a Propeller production through storyboards, plotting out how his initial scenic concept will move through the narrative and marking each panel with potential actions or lines from the text. For Pavelka, the storyboard serves as a "road map of moments" or

of events – events that we pitch at the company as a narrative tool kit: a framework to work with. I'll also include in my notation relevant lines from the play. I will try to get a sense of where and who the audience are in relation to these events: where the interval comes is very important. What the storyboard gives us is a fluid way of seeing a prototype, and because the frames are done with this very, very crude and wonderful thing called a pencil, it means that they look provisional, disposable.<sup>48</sup>

He describes the storyboards as a guide for how his scenic designs will aid presenting the overall narrative of a Propeller production. Storyboards from 1997 and 2011's *Henry V* show how he envisions the progression of the production while refraining

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<sup>48</sup> Pavelka, "Making the Work of Play," 135-136.



from presenting the images as finite. In the former, the primary relationship depicted is that between the Watermill and the people within it, both spectator and actor. In the latter images, Pavelka has used pencil to indicate how set pieces may be combined and re-positioned to create different stage pictures. In all of these images, the actors are the most clearly defined figures, marked either by white crayon or darkened pencil. This style of drawing focuses on how each actor inhabits the space. In the 2011 drawings, especially, the scenic components are relegated to faint impressions that contextualize the figures without overwhelming them.

These storyboards illustrate how Pavelka considers the actors' bodies as part of the scenic design in their own right. The actors signal location, move scenic pieces, and create an atmosphere of claustrophobia, voyeurism, or celebration in conjunction with the needs of the story. The simplicity of his designs allows for the pattern of bodies on the stage to signal transitions within the production, and Pavelka's awareness of the actors' presence or absence as marking these transitions complements Hall's directorial approach of telling Shakespeare's stories through specific moments:

What engages me is that [Hall] understands the potential of a dramatic moment, a theatrical moment that has power and that would connect with an audience or just other human beings. So what's been a revelation over the years [...] is a way of looking at a text, a Shakespeare text, tremendously fluidly, but starting from a position of recognizing a powerful moment. Nothing else. Not a scene, not a character, not a theme. It's about the moment.<sup>49</sup>

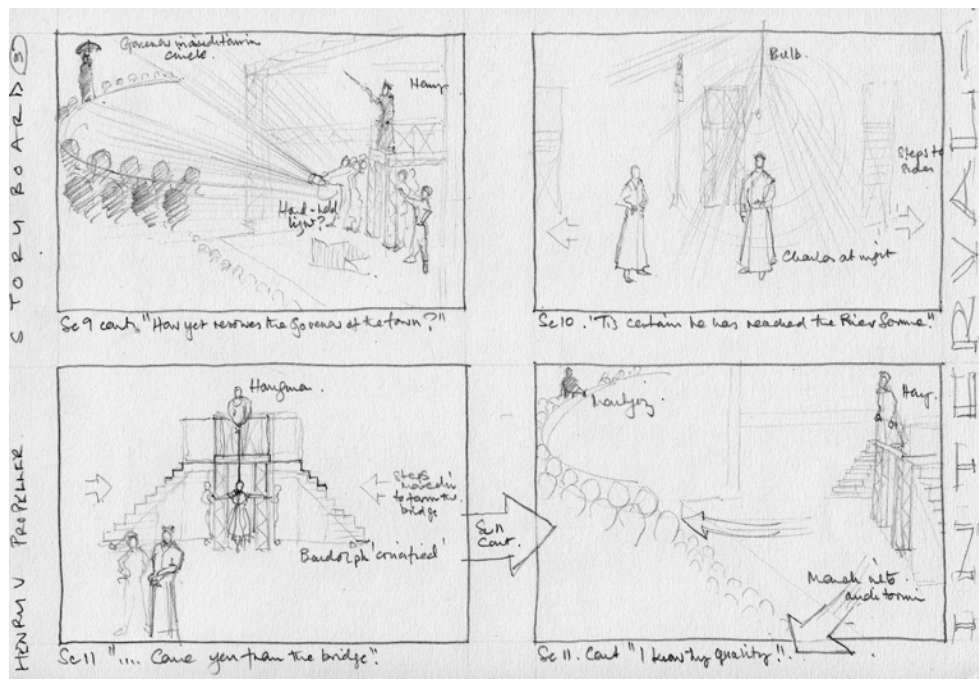
Pavelka's storyboards serve as suggestions to how these moments may be staged. For example, the 2011 storyboard for Bardolph's execution (marked as scene eleven in Figure 2) positions him between two soldiers as the central structure becomes a gallows, overseen by a "hangman" at the top of the platform. This configuration

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<sup>49</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.



Fig. 1, Storyboards from 1997's *Henry V* depicting the negotiations between Henry and the Governor of Harfleur (top left), the interval marker (bottom left), Bardolph's execution (top right), and the eve of Agincourt (bottom right). Copyright Michael Pavelka.



**Fig. 2, Storyboards from 2011's *Henry V* depicting the negotiations between Henry and the Governor of Harfleur (top left), the French court (top right), Bardolph's execution (bottom left), and Henry's negotiation with Montjoy (bottom right).  
Copyright Michael Pavelka.**

echoes that of the same moment in the 1997 storyboards, where a body was hung from the Watermill's outdoor staircase (Figure 1). Downstage left, one of the two figures is holding a sword, an identifying feature of King Henry, which indicates the king should be present for Bardolph's execution. The scene continues in the next frame, where King Henry has ascended to the top of the platform, displacing the hangmen, so as to converse with Montjoy, who is positioned in the dress circle of the auditorium. The arrows pointing into the theatre imply that, as the king and Montjoy negotiate, the remaining cast is to leave through the auditorium, signaling the beginning of the interval.

Though Pavelka occasionally visits the rehearsal room, these visits are to check on the designs' practicality and not to monitor how the actors are using them in performance. Pavelka says that he prefers this arrangement because he enjoys being "surprised by what [the actors] have done" with his designs.<sup>50</sup> For example, in performance, Bardolph's death unfolded differently than it is depicted in Pavelka's storyboard. Instead of being hanged by an anonymous executioner, Bardolph was led to the top of the platform and had his neck broken by Exeter. Henry made his entrance after the execution, confronted with the image of his dead friend who was left slumped on the platform for the remainder of the scene. Pistol handed Henry the pax that Bardolph had stolen, at which point Montjoy entered and the negotiations between him and Henry were conducted face-to-face. Henry subsequently gave the pax to Montjoy, who exited, and the king was left onstage staring at Bardolph's corpse as the soldier chorus exited the stage via the auditorium. While the design for this scene remained the same as in Pavelka's storyboards — two staircases pushed to either side of the dual-leveled tower to form a bridge — the actors used the set in a different

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<sup>50</sup> Tony Bell, personal interview, London, 1 April 2014; Pavelka, personal interview.

way than he imagined, changing Henry and Montjoy's locations throughout the scene and significantly altering the method of Bardolph's death. Rather than a scene that showed a procedural execution and a King who conducted business from a powerful physical position, scene eleven showed a brutal contact killing and put Henry on the same physical level as his soldiers.

Henry's isolation was emphasized by the exiting of the soldier chorus through the auditorium, a reverse of the audience's movement back inside the theatre that occurred after the same moment in 1997. The inclusion of movement lines to indicate the actors' foray into the spectator space shows another consideration at this stage of Pavelka's process — how proximity between actor and spectator may be increased within a proscenium arch theatre. Pavelka has long had an awareness of the impact auditorium design has on the kinetic potential of design, from his experience watching the National Theatre's 1978 *Brand* in the Olivier auditorium — the space modeled after a Greek amphitheatre and identified by Pavelka as “a place where a community came together and a space in which that community could not only see each other but simultaneously engage with a piece of drama”— to his exposure to Richard Negri's experiments with spatial arrangements.<sup>51</sup> Absorbing these ideas has led Pavelka to recognize that “[t]he designer [...] has a major role to play in how we commune in a single space. Attention must be paid to the shape and dynamics of the production's architecture and how that connects with the audience.”<sup>52</sup> Changes to the spatial relationships found within a theatre have the effect of altering how a spectator sees herself within it. Observing one of Robert Greer's community-based

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<sup>51</sup> Pavelka, personal interview. Pavelka attended Wimbledon at a time during which Negri was not the acting head of the theatre design department. However, Negri was still a major presence and directed three student productions during this period, in which Pavelka participated. See also: David Fraser, ed., *The Royal Exchange Theatre Company: An Illustrated Record* (Manchester: Royal Exchange Theatre Company Ltd, 1988), 11, 16, 19; George Hall, “Obituary: Richard Negri,” *The Independent*, 14 June 1999, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/obituary-richard-negri-1100059.html>, accessed online 27 December 2013.

<sup>52</sup> Pavelka, *So You Want to be a Theatre Designer?*, 81.

productions, Bruce McConachie found that when the audience can watch each other as well as the performers it “generally encourages actors and spectators to conceive of themselves as participants within a single container, not as individuals engaged in a panoptic, center-periphery mode of viewing that often results in voyeurism.”<sup>53</sup> Gay McAuley points to the spectator/spectator gaze as something which both contextualizes the performance as part of a social event and reminds the audience that it is assisting in the performance by providing half of the exchange of energy required.<sup>54</sup> By suggesting the movement of the actors through the audience, Pavelka prompts a temporary change in the spatial relationship between spectator and performer and turns the gaze of the audience towards itself in the auditorium rather than onto the actors onstage.

Throughout the twentieth century, these ideas of communal audience experience were often associated with Shakespeare through references to the outdoor Elizabethan theatre, aligning Pavelka’s design interests with Hall’s pursuit of “traditional” — which is to say, Shakespearean — performance methodology. Reviewing one of William Poel’s productions for the Elizabethan Stage Society, founded in 1894, George Bernard Shaw observed the thrust stage “gets closer home to its hearers” than the proscenium arch stage.<sup>55</sup> Tyrone Guthrie’s experience adapting a 1936 performance of *Hamlet* to be performed in the round led him to conclude that

for Shakespeare the proscenium arch stage was unsatisfactory [Re-staging in the round] related the audience to a Shakespearean play in a different and I thought a more lyrical, satisfying and effective way than

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<sup>53</sup> Bruce McConachie, “Using cognitive science to understand spatiality and community in the theatre,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 12, no. 3 (2002): 109.

<sup>54</sup> Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 268, 275.

<sup>55</sup> Iain Mackintosh, *Architect, Actor and Audience* (London: Routledge, 1993), 52.

can ever be achieved in a theatre of what is still regarded as orthodox design.<sup>56</sup>

Negri's arena stage design for the Royal Exchange, which opened in 1974, was said to be a "strong evocation of the Elizabethan theatre."<sup>57</sup> More recently, the Royal Shakespeare Company underwent major renovations from 2007-2010 to convert the notoriously difficult Royal Shakespeare Theatre from a proscenium arch stage to what then-artistic director Michael Boyd described as

a theatre which celebrates interaction. Our commitment to bring an immediacy and clarity to Shakespeare means we need to bring the audience to a more engaged relationship with our actors. The best way we can achieve this is in a bold, thrust-stage, one-room auditorium — a modern take on the theatres of Shakespeare's day.<sup>58</sup>

Hall's own 2001 description of Propeller identifies "the relationship between the performer and audience in and around the play" as of "paramount importance," but one that is hampered by "a stage that bears no architectural resemblance to the theatre of Shakespeare's day."<sup>59</sup> In theaters such as the Olivier or the Royal Exchange, the designer is working within a space that naturally lends itself to a sense of community, as the spatial relationships are largely dictated by the permanent architecture of the theatre itself. Similarly, in adaptable spaces, the designer has more freedom to dictate the relationship between spectator and performer than he or she would have designing for an auditorium with a permanent configuration.

The Watermill Theatre is an example of one such theatre space that promotes exploring the relationship between spectator and actor. Pavelka describes the

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<sup>56</sup> Guthrie's production was originally staged for the proscenium arch and was to be performed outside at Kronberg Castle in Denmark. When pouring rain drove the production indoors, Guthrie re-staged it in a ballroom, with the audience sat in a circle around the playing space. Quoted in Mackintosh, 53.

<sup>57</sup> Mackintosh, 92.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in John Nathan, "Royal Shakespeare Company Unveils \$185 Million Development Project," *Playbill*, 15 June 2006, <http://www.playbill.com/news/article/royal-shakespeare-company-unveils-185-million-development-project-133214>, accessed 30 December 2014.

<sup>59</sup> Edward Hall, "Rose Rage: The Company," in *Rose Rage: An adaptation of the Henry VI plays in two parts*, eds. Edward Hall and Roger Warren (London: Oberon Books, Ltd., 2001), 5.

Watermill as a space that encourages the involvement of the audience in the theatrical event, one of the many ways in which the Watermill was instrumental in creating the performance attributes now associated with Propeller.<sup>60</sup> The Watermill is a convertible space, accommodating proscenium arch, thrust, or in-the-round stagings. However, even in the proscenium arch arrangement, the circle level extends around the playing space, so all seats within the auditorium give the spectator a view of fellow theatre-goers. The movement lines indicated in his 2011 storyboards are noticeably absent in their 1997 counterparts as the presence of the spectators around the playing space naturally increased the proximity between actor and audience. This proximity was increased by the Watermill's small size: its maximum audience capacity is 236, with 128 seats in the stalls and 108 in the circle, and both levels' seating surrounds the stage on three sides.<sup>61</sup> It has a proscenium width of 4.4 meters, height of 4.1 meters, lighting grid height of 6.6 meters, and approximately a 1.5 meters of wing space on either side of the stage.<sup>62</sup> These measurements leave little room for large or numerous set pieces or multiple realistic sets for a single show, as there is limited playing and storage space.

Working in a theatre that naturally lends itself to foregrounding the actor, Pavelka drew on Negri's attitude toward theatre as a "social" or "spiritual" event "that involves the audience and their proximity, their engagement."<sup>63</sup> The first half of 1997's *Henry V* was staged indoors, the scenic elements confined to punching bags that hung from the theatre's pillars and what looked like large ammunition boxes that were brought on by the actors. In the production's second half, the audience was ushered

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<sup>60</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.

<sup>61</sup> "Seating Plan," The Watermill Theatre, [https://www.watermill.org.uk/seating\\_plan](https://www.watermill.org.uk/seating_plan), accessed 24 March 2015.

<sup>62</sup> "Watermill Theatre," Association of British Theatre Technicians, 26 June 2013, <http://www.abtt.org.uk/resource/watermill-theatre/>, accessed 24 March 2015.

<sup>63</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.



outside, and the rolling lawns of the small Berkshire theatre momentarily became the fields of Agincourt. Whereas inside the theatre the audience had surrounded the playing space, the shift outside reversed the actor-audience relationship by placing the audience in the center and surrounding it by the performers.<sup>64</sup> The audience found themselves occupying a halfway point between spectator and participant and, on at least one occasion, Henry's battle cry "prove[d] so stirring [...] half the audience charged after him."<sup>65</sup> The use of the Watermill's grounds not only blurred the lines between performer and observer but also those between the *Henry V*'s fictional world and that of the theatrical event, since the use of the Watermill's building and outdoor spaces made it difficult to determine the boundaries of the presentational space.

Until 2005, all of Propeller's plays were designed to be performed in the round at the Watermill, taking advantage of the natural affinity between spectator and performer afforded by the theatre's size and flexible space. This staging required all aspects of his designs to be "absolutely connected to the actors."<sup>66</sup> These productions' success then allowed them to tour, and Pavelka's sets — which continued to consist of scenographic properties rather than large structures — were subsequently adapted for other auditoria. However, that is no longer the case, as Propeller has evolved into an independent touring company. The *Richard III/The Comedy of Errors* tour, for example, visited eleven theatres in the UK as well as traveling to Italy, the United States of America, Spain, Germany, Ireland, and Denmark for a total of nineteen tour stops across eighteen theatres.<sup>67</sup> Pavelka identifies the 2005 *The Winter's Tale* as the first

<sup>64</sup> Jon Lewis, "A winning performance," *Newbury Weekly News*, 8 May 1997, personal collection of Tony Bell.

<sup>65</sup> Lyn Gardner, "Henry V," *The Guardian*, 21 May 1997, personal collection of Tony Bell.

<sup>66</sup> Pavelka, personal interview. See also: Pavelka, *So You Want to be a Theatre Designer?*, 168.

<sup>67</sup> "Richard III and The Comedy of Errors 2010/11," Propeller website, <http://propeller.org.uk/productions/richard-iii-and-the-comedy-of-errors-201011/tour-dates>, accessed 9 February 2015; "Propeller on Tour," *Richard III* program (Coventry: Belgrade Theatre, 2010), np.; "Propeller on Tour," *Richard III/The Comedy of Errors* program (Sheffield: Lyceum Theatre, 2011), np.. Propeller visited the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry twice during the tour, first with only *Richard III* and then again with both productions.



production where the knowledge of its touring future directly influenced his design, and it was the first production to be staged for the proscenium arch rather than in the round.<sup>68</sup> Instead of the mobile, flexible scenic designs built of pieces that could then be transformed by the actors into performance tools, *The Winter's Tale* set was a stationary, three-walled structure that surrounded the boundaries of the playing space with ladders leading to an upper platform that ran along all three walls. The center playing space was left open, in keeping with Pavelka's other designs, but the structure was constructed from steel frames and card foam which was treated to resemble stone, with "a timber floor shaped to look like tiles."<sup>69</sup> The materials created the impression of, in Carol Chillington Rutter's opinion, an "oak-panelled Jacobean hall, renovated from something much older into a gentleman's snug."<sup>70</sup> Additional flats were placed



**Figs. 3 and 4, *The Winter's Tale* (2005). Left: Leontes (Vince Leigh) attacks Hermione (Simon Scardifield). Copyright Richard Termine. Right: Emilia (James Tucker) during Hermione's trial. Copyright Tristram Kenton. The second image shows the detail of the upstage right wall, and the fold-out piano is visible behind the table.**

on the downstage corners of the stage to mask the side entrances from the wings, and pieces of the set would be periodically removed to reveal something masked underneath: a keyboard piano nestled in the upstage right wall, a hidden door upstage left, a lower platform center stage, etc. The combination of reflective panels along the

<sup>68</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare and Child's Play: Performing Lost Boys on Stage and Screen* (London: Routledge, 2007), 100.

back wall and Ben Ormerod's lighting design gave the impression of flickering candlelight. *The Winter's Tale* was more substantial than Pavelka's previous designs and was used to create a more specific onstage world than had previously been seen in Propeller productions.

Discussing his decision to redesign the set for the company's 2012 re-staging, Pavelka cites dissatisfaction with his original work based on its disconnection from the people who occupied the space:

The scenic fakery in the first *Winter's Tale* production hadn't been articulated to the audience through the performance. It was just *there*, as my statement, and my statement doesn't count for anything unless it's engaged with the whole company. [...] I suppose old habits kicked in and I hadn't fully appreciated that what we were doing in the round — the integrity of working with the actors and the floor and the objects — should be more sensitively presented and could be more sensitively presented, preserving those precepts on a proscenium stage.<sup>71</sup>

Pavelka's description of the original set identifies it as decorative, a regression into an untried designer's preference to create ornamental sets instead of sets that actively impact the production in performance. That Pavelka had been developing a design aesthetic for Propeller over a number of years only to slip back in into "old habits" when presented with the prospect of more traditionally constructed spaces is illustrative of how the Watermill influenced Propeller's progression as a company. When Pavelka tried to break away from that relationship and revert to something more traditional, as in the 2005 *The Winter's Tale*, it revealed the extent to which his work with the company had rendered such a regression unsatisfactory.

Pavelka's experience with *The Winter's Tale* led him to realize that the sensation of in-the-round theatre could and should be translated to proscenium arch houses. He has since striven to use his scenic designs to preserve some of the intimacy and

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<sup>71</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.

audience engagement that the Watermill so naturally encouraged. One way he does this is to anticipate the actors' use of the entire theatre, as evidenced by his inclusion of the auditorium in the storyboards for *Henry V*. In 2011's scene nine (top left frame of Figure 3), Pavelka placed the Governor of Harfleur in the dress circle, bridging the space between the actor's position and the stage through lines meant to indicate light. This illustration shows how the audience will physically be placed in the middle of the dispute between the warring Henry and the Governor of Harfleur.

In this scene, Henry promised the Governor would see:

The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand  
Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters;  
Your fathers taken by the silver beards,  
And their most reverend heads dashed to the walls;  
Your naked infants spitted upon pikes [...] <sup>72</sup>

His words were strengthened by the men around him, shadowy figures obscured by the blinding floodlights pointing outward over the auditorium. Yet, the moment the town was surrendered, the lights were turned off and the soldiers were revealed to be sick, exhausted men who had as much to fear from the women, old men and babies of Harfleur as that town's citizens had to fear from them. This moment illustrates how Pavelka's storyboard anticipates the conflation of what McAuley terms the stage space with that of the audience space.<sup>73</sup> When the lights were on, the auditorium became the town of Harfleur and spectators were positioned to view Henry's soldiers as a threatening force. When the floodlights were turned off, spectators then had their perspective altered to one which revealed the soldiers for what they really were. Since the space between the actors constitutes part of the fictional world of the play, the actors' use of the auditorium weakens the psychological divide between "inside" and

<sup>72</sup> Edward Hall and Roger Warren, eds., *Propeller Shakespeare: Henry V* (London: Oberon Books, Ltd., 2012), 52.

<sup>73</sup> McAuley, 27.

“outside” the performance. Though these movements are not structural design features, they show how Pavelka’s conceptualization of his designs considers the full use of the auditorium, which can lead to dynamic performance moments.

Another way in which Pavelka adapts the spatiality of the auditoria is through his physical scenic design. As the relationship with the Watermill changed and the theatre ceased to be Propeller’s staging grounds, Pavelka’s scenic designs grew more structural, pro-actively shaping the spectators’ perceptions of the playing spaces of the mostly proscenium arch houses to which Propeller tours. The next phase of his process, the three-dimensional model or “maquette,” provides an opportunity for Pavelka and Hall to test the physicality of the designs and how they will practically function within those spaces. Built to a 1:25 scale, these models are Pavelka and Hall’s “pre-rehearsal rooms” and help them finalize which scenic properties will comprise the scenic design.<sup>74</sup> Pavelka’s designs carry with them the responsibility of finding a way to encourage a relationship between spectator and performer that overcomes contemporary theatre architecture so as to reclaim a bit of the atmosphere of the outdoor Elizabethan theatre.

Pavelka does this by creating scenic designs for Propeller that, though un-“original,” still echo the basic structure of the Elizabethan amphitheater in order to preserve the interplay between performer/spectator.<sup>75</sup> Pavelka’s sets are comprised of two forms of scenic component: a stationary framing set and a range of mobile properties. The former runs along the stage left and stage right areas, which can either continue along the upstage wall to form a U-shaped perimeter or be confined to the sides of the playing space. These side structures provide entrances into the acting area

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<sup>74</sup> Pavelka, “Making the Work of Play,” 136.

<sup>75</sup> References to the Elizabethan playhouse in this chapter refer to the outdoor theatres such as the Globe, Curtain, and Theatre. Though Propeller has produced plays which were originally staged in indoor spaces, the company routinely refers to original methods as they pertained to outdoor performance and I confine my analysis to comparisons with such spaces.



Fig. 5, Digital rendering for *Richard III* (2010). Copyright Michael Pavelka.

as well as a second, upper level for the actors. The mobile properties are then rearranged to indicate shifts within the play. These designs for Propeller are strongly grounded in each production's specific interpretive approach and they are also linked by a consistency in form that preserves the fluidity, pace, and flexibility that the Watermill helped establish.<sup>76</sup>

The set for *Richard III* is indicative of Pavelka's aesthetic for Propeller. The conceptual framework Hall and Pavelka decided upon for *Richard III* was to explore "Richard's obsessive, compulsive behaviour from the perspective of his internal psyche – he was 'observed' by the audience, as a patient in a Victorian sanatorium."<sup>77</sup> *Richard III*'s stationary framing set was made of two sets of metal scaffolding, one on either side of the stage, which connected the downstage and upstage corners of the playing space. The metal gridwork was made of a larger pattern than that of *Rose Rage* but

<sup>76</sup> Pavelka, "Designing *The Winter's Tale*," 14.

<sup>77</sup> Michael Pavelka, "Richard III," Michael Pavelka website, <http://www.michaelpavelka.com/research/research-excellence-framework/a-richard-iii/>, accessed 31 December 2013.

decorated the stage with similar, industrial, geometric patterns in keeping with the earlier production.<sup>78</sup> A wheeled tower was the dominant mobile property with metal bars that crisscrossed the two sides facing stage left and right to support a second level, while the upstage and downstage sides were either left open or closed off from view by heavy, shredded plastic curtains — the same kind that hung, usually gathered in bunches, in a larger version from either side of the stage. There was a mirroring between the mobile platform and the proscenium: a stage within a stage where the focus on small acts of violence — Clarence's drowning, the murder of the princes — gave greater context to the sweeping carnage of Richard's rise to power. A number of antiquated medical screens were used to create temporary rooms and corridors or, for small sleights of hand, to reveal or conceal the actors' entrances and exits. A rough wooden gurney, hinged in the middle and evocative of old examining tables, was Edward's throne and his deathbed, the prince's nursery cot, and the platform upon which Buckingham was eviscerated. In the upstage left corner, a partial row of metal lockers extended from the wings, recalling the lockers that had formed the basis for the *Rose Rage* set.

This atmosphere created by *Richard III*'s scenic design was in stark contrast to that of *The Comedy of Errors*, though both sets relied on the same underlying structure. *Richard III* began performance in November 2010, but once *The Comedy of Errors* began performances in January 2011, the sets not only needed to be able to travel but also to transition between the two productions. Propeller's sets must be efficiently deconstructed and re-constructed on different types of stages and the majority of its *Richard III/The Comedy of Errors* tour stops lasted just one week. The company would

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<sup>78</sup> This sort of framework was repeated in the 2011 production of *Henry V*, which revived design elements of the original 1997 production within *Richard III*'s overall scenic structure, paving the way for Propeller's eventual History Cycle.

perform on a Saturday evening only to have the entire production packed up that same night so as to be fitted into the next theatre on the itinerary in time for an evening performance on the following Tuesday, three days later. Sometimes this transition had to occur within a single afternoon because, thirty-three times during the tour, Propeller performed both productions in the same day, leaving approximately two hours between the matinee performance finishing and opening the auditorium for the evening performance.<sup>79</sup>

The set for *Comedy of Errors* recalled the a seedy tourist area of a city center, garish and slightly tacky. The dominating structures were three corrugated metal sheets placed stage left, right, and upstage center, which were reminiscent of the kind used to close up corner shops and which were attached to *Richard III*'s scaffolding and mobile tower. These sheets did not extend the depth of the stage, leaving plenty of open space between them and creating the impression that the wings of the stage were part of the playing space. Each sheet was half covered with looping white, pink, and yellow graffiti — almost but not quite forming letters — upon a brilliant blue background. The sides each had a door in their centers and the one upstage center had two central doors, one at ground level and one approximately six feet above that. The door on the ground level formed part of detachable section of the wall, which was brought downstage when Antipholus of Ephesus was denied entry to his house and, later in the production, to signify the abbey. The upstage door served as a discovery space, revealing the two set of twins as a visual counterpoint to Aegeon's expository monologue and then again as the bedroom whence Adriana beckoned Antipholus of Syracuse. Multi-colored carnival lights connected each of the three

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<sup>79</sup> The time allotted for changeover varied according to which production was performed in the afternoon. *Richard III* had a running time of two hours and forty-five minutes while *The Comedy of Errors* was two hour and fifteen minutes. My estimates assume a twenty minute interval and the house opening half an hour before the performance beginning in the evening.





**Fig. 6, Digital rendering for *The Comedy of Errors* (2011). Copyright Michael Pavelka.**

partial walls to a red and white striped flagpole upstage right. The corners of the stage were littered with garbage, and actors brought on a metal café table and two chairs as needed. This metal café dining set and two large plastic wheelie bins were the only mobile properties used.

The combination of the structural frame and the mobile properties provided the actors with an open acting space that they controlled and was evocative of the Elizabethan playhouse, a fact not lost on Pavelka. Speaking about his design for *The Comedy of Errors*, he directly connects his version of Ephesus with the framework of Shakespeare's stage space:

Shakespeare's usual implicit arrangement of three entrances and exits on three sides or, as at the Globe, set into the a single upstage tiring house with a central balcony above, is a formula for the scenic architecture that designers ignore at their and the production's peril. Propeller's Ephesus mirrored this exact plan so that exits and entrances stretched an entering actor's journey across the stage, allowing for plenty of time to improvise en route, before building up a dangerous



head of steam to make a super-fast exit.<sup>80</sup>

The tiring house and balcony to which Pavelka refers are often reimagined as the mobile discovery space described above. Even in cases such as *Rose Rage* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where a mobile discovery space is not overtly included in the scenic design, Pavelka includes a shielded entry point upstage center, preserving the architectural features of the Elizabethan playhouse. His designs also include a secondary acting level above the main playing space, giving the actors a range of vertical as well as horizontal physical options. Sometimes this upper playing area is clearly signaled through the presence of railings and/or stairs, such as the upper door in *The Comedy of Errors* or the railings that framed the upper platform of *Richard III's* mobile tower. Other times, the upper level is not so clearly defined. In *Twelfth Night*, there were two mobile discovery spaces in the form of wardrobes. These wardrobes had flat, unadorned tops that were nonetheless used by the actors, such as when Jack Tarleton lay across one in Orsino's melancholic repose. The interior of the structures served as separate containers within the playing space which could be shielded from view by the wardrobes' doors.

As with Pavelka's other scenic designs, these wardrobes were decided on before the rehearsal process had begun. In other companies, having a pre-determined set can lead to feelings of entrapment and limitations on performance potential as it anticipates rather than responds to the work of the rehearsal room.<sup>81</sup> Propeller is able to avoid such feelings because of the flexibility Pavelka includes in his scenic designs,

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<sup>80</sup> Michael Pavelka, "Designing *The Comedy of Errors*."

<sup>81</sup> Antony Sher wrote about this problem regarding designs for the RSC's 1984 *Richard III*: "Bill D.'s set designs had to be in by February. And however exciting they may look, they closed all other options long before rehearsals — the real exploration of the play — had even started." *Year of the King* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1985), 160. Deborah Findlay similarly wrote about a water curtain used for *The Merchant of Venice* in 1987, also at the RSC, which was not tested until the technical rehearsal, at which point it did not function properly and was cut "leaving the Belmont image incomplete." Russell Jackson and Robert Smallwood, eds., *Players of Shakespeare 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 54. See also: McAuley, 80.

which allows for constant experimentation. Even though the set's individual components and overall concept will have already been decided on, how each component is used to convey each narrative beat is open to experimentation. Writing about his 2011 design for the revival of *Henry V*, Pavelka referred to it as "Part-gym-part-parade ground," continuing, "the designed 'tool kit' for the story is tested to the max by the boys in the rehearsal room."<sup>82</sup> Here, Pavelka invokes language of construction and utilization to describe his scenic design. A gym exists for physical exertion, comprised of pieces of equipment that only become functional once employed by an individual, just as tools are used by individuals to construct, fix, or dismantle, their purpose determined by their users. Bryony Rutter's description of the scenic design in rehearsals similarly gestures towards their status as tools rather than static structures: "The *Richard III* set was a concept from the beginning: then the actors figured out how to make that work practically onstage."<sup>83</sup> Rutter presents a dichotomy between the conceptual and practical existence of the scenic design, assigning responsibility equally to both Pavelka and the acting company in creating the set's role in production. In this way, Pavelka's design process mirrors Hall's directorial approach, as each starts from a shared concept that they then develop into parallel frames of guidance for the actors to work with in rehearsal, one theoretical (development of character, movement, and vocal delivery that stems from Hall) and one material (provided by Pavelka).

Knowing that the uses for the mobile properties will be developed through practical experimentation in rehearsal, Pavelka tries to incorporate options into their construction to make them adaptable. For example:

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<sup>82</sup> Pavelka, "Designing *Henry V*," in Hall and Warren, 12.

<sup>83</sup> Bryony Rutter, email correspondence, 2 February 2014.

I know why I wanted the wardrobes, and I knew what each wardrobe had to do. [...] What [Hall] does, then, with the actors, is invent and reinvent with it. [What] I've got to do is make sure that it can do as many things as possible either visually or physically. For example, I wanted to make a two-way mirror so they could see through it, but the actors have to pass through it. They had to get inside and move it and see where they were going without the audiences being able to see them seeing where they were going. [...] We know the properties, but in rehearsal they embellish that and embellish that and embellish that.<sup>84</sup>

The wardrobes Pavelka mentions were used in *Twelfth Night* and *The Taming of the Shrew* in a variety of ways: a toilet for Sir Andrew Aguecheek, a bench for Orsino and Viola, a passageway which Sebastian entered in from one side only to have Viola-as-Cesario exit through the other, the entrance to Olivia's bedroom and Hortensio's house, an upper platform for Orsino and Grumio, a toy theatre through which Lucio first sees the citizens of Padua, and an observation point from which Tranio and Hortensio viewed Bianca's loose behavior, not to mention a functional clothes closet. The wardrobe took on the same kind of dual reality as the actor in the minds of the audiences, both the object as presented and the object as used. In contrast, a 2000 NT production of *Henry V* included a functioning Jeep onstage. Having seen the production as an audience member, Propeller actor Simon Scardifield cited its use as indicative of the problem of pairing Shakespeare with spectacle, as the audience was taken out of the story to appreciate the novelty of the moment and wonder about the cost and logistics associated with bringing a real car onstage.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, the NT's *Henry V* went against the theatrical context in which Shakespeare's plays originated by denying spectators an opportunity to collude with the performers in imagining the world of the play.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.

<sup>85</sup> Simon Scardifield, workshop for MA: Shakespeare and Creativity, The Shakespeare Institute, 2 November 2014.

<sup>86</sup> Purcell, 180-181.

In Pavelka's designs, the notion of "play" as a transformative framework that redefines actions as representative rather than "real" extends from the words, actions, and presence of the actors to the material objects themselves. We see the wardrobe at the same time that we see the doors to a stately house, just as we see both the actor and the king he is portraying. Regarding the similar simplicity of his designs for *Cheek by Jowl*, designer Nick Ormerod calls attention to the effect of a bare stage on an audience's imaginative capacity:

[Y]ou can do things so freely. You can have people drumming their fingers on the stage for rain, or Macbeth or Banquo having been killed just walking off. Audiences will totally and quite happily accept that, because something's being demanded of them which values their involvement in the production.<sup>87</sup>

Ormerod credits scenic simplicity with increasing performance options since the actor is freed from maintaining a consistent illusion, which consequently leads to audiences actively navigating through a production's shifting forms of representation. The materiality of Pavelka's designs seeks to recapture some of the physical advantages of collectivist theatre space, but the absence of illusion is equally important in cultivating the audience's response to the work. Though individual responses are beyond Propeller's control, Pavelka's work invites complicity, and, "[h]aving collaborated in a process of imaginative communion, the spectator's emotional response will ideally become similarly unified with that of the rest of the audience."<sup>88</sup> The actors' engagement with the scenic material helps encourage their engagement with the overall production, which leads to a performance style that invites audiences into the collaborative process, turning Shakespeare's plays into acts of communal, imaginative story-telling.

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<sup>87</sup> Nick Ormerod, quoted in Simon Reade, *Cheek by Jowl: Ten Years of Celebration* (Bath: Absolute Classic, 1991), 70.

<sup>88</sup> Purcell, 148.

The final pre-construction stage of the design process is a digital rendering of the set (Figures 5 and 6). If the storyboard helps visualize the actor in the space, and the maquette defines the limitations and possibilities of moving through that space, then the digital rendering aids Pavelka, Hall, and the acting company as a whole in understanding how the audience will perceive these movements and transitions.<sup>89</sup> An added advantage of these digital renderings is that they can be projected onto a screen in the rehearsal room, which gives Pavelka “a way of presenting the design to make the occasion democratic and accessible, so the whole company are together at the ‘off.’”<sup>90</sup> Again, the audience is a primary focus, as the actor can visualize the potential impacts their movements will have on the spectators. The projection increases the size of the image and allows Pavelka to guide his actors through their performance space, eradicating the hierarchy unintentionally imposed by a number of men trying to jostle for the best view into a small box.<sup>91</sup> Everyone is given equal access to the conceptual beginnings of the scenic design, which aids in making the actors feel included in the process of conceptualizing a production.<sup>92</sup>

Furthermore, the digital renderings are the most detailed of the pre-construction phases, envisioning the sets’ final construction and materiality, which are integrated with Propeller’s use of a choric presence. Part of Propeller’s aim is to “turn [the] productions into an event,” making “the performance experience begin for the audience as soon as they [walk] into the theatre.”<sup>93</sup> In many cases, the actors confront spectators with Hall and Pavelka’s conceptual framework before audience members have entered the auditorium, disrupting the conventional process by which audiences

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<sup>89</sup> Pavelka, “Making the Work of Play,” 142-143.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> “Edward Hall on Propeller’s *Henry V* and *The Winter’s Tale*.”

prepare for viewing a performance by denying the anticipation afforded through a closed curtain or empty stage.<sup>94</sup> Costumed actors may appear in the theatre's lobby, such as in *Henry V* (1997, 2011), *The Taming of the Shrew* (2006, 2013), or *The Comedy of Errors* (2011, 2014), invading the spectator space and consequently redefining what is considered the stage space within a production. In instances where the actors confine themselves to the auditorium, they might watch patrons from the stage, returning the spectators' gazes and challenging perceptions of who is watching and who is being watched, as in *Rose Rage* (2002), *The Merchant of Venice* (2008), or *Richard III* (2011). In other cases, the actors' presence in these moments is recognized retroactively — a sheet pulled back to reveal a bleary-eyed party guest in *Twelfth Night* (2007, 2012) or a pair of feet poking open the lid of a box from the inside in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2003, 2009, 2013) — confronting patrons with the revelation that the production had begun before they were aware. Where the choric characters are situated at the beginning of the production is indicative of their presence within it: starting from the auditorium signals human actors presenting a play-within-a-play, while beginning onstage indicates the choric presence is somehow supernatural. In all of these openings, the use of the auditorium challenges expectations about the traditional spatial and functional relationships between audience and actor. Because the actors are constantly visible, their bodies contribute to Pavelka's scenography and impact how he uses materials to preserve the performer's centrality and affect the audience's perception of space.

This visibility dictates the components that are used to construct Pavelka's scenic designs. A large part of his dissatisfaction with the 2005 *The Winter's Tale* set was his choice of materials, and, when Propeller re-mounted the show in 2012, he

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<sup>94</sup> McAuley, 75-76.

seized upon it as an opportunity to “retain the spatial principles [of the set] but reinvent its tone by a radical change in architecture.”<sup>95</sup> A comparison of the two



**Fig. 7, *The Winter's Tale* (2012). Leontes (Robert Hands) accuses Hermione (Richard Dempsey) while Antigonus (Dugald Bruce-Lockhart, center) and courtiers look on. Copyright Manuel Harlan.**

productions illustrates his developing concern for using the scenic design's materiality to focus attention on the actors (Figures 3, 4, and 7). For the 2012 revival of *The Winter's Tale*, reflective surfaces became the set's primary material, moving away from a set that Pavelka feels was “physically heavy, too ‘folksy’ and didn’t quite capture the universal spirit of the piece.”<sup>96</sup> Pavelka had employed similarly mirrored panels in the 2006/7 tour of *Twelfth Night* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, and the warped reflections connected with the identity shifts the characters in those plays undergo, while also implicating the audience in the onstage action. In those productions, the material was used sparingly, inset into large wardrobes and providing a runner along the upstage wall. For this second *The Winter's Tale*, Pavelka swapped the wood paneling for sleek, unadorned metal walls, creating a kind of silver version of Christopher Morley's white

<sup>95</sup> Pavelka, “Designing *The Winter's Tale*,” 15.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

box from the RSC's 1969 season. Above the metal box, the upper part of the visual space was dominated by a cyclorama upon which a large image of a moon slowly waned as Leontes' obsession eroded his sanity. This was a world dominated by night, by nightmares, and by the darkness of Leontes' jealousy, which reached its peak in a vicious storm that signaled Apollo's displeasure and only abated when the Old Shepherd appeared, seeking his sheep on the shores of Bohemia. As he discussed with his son things both dying and newborn, the softer blues projected on cyclorama gradually lightened and, when the two men exited the stage with baby Perdita, the final image of the production's first half was a gentle rainbow coloring the "sky." Pavelka used the metal to "both literally and metaphorically reflect fractured images of the characters merged with a more distant and diffused you – the onlooker, our community, onstage."<sup>97</sup> Its use in the 2012 *The Winter's Tale* not only addressed some of the problems of the 2005 design by using the actors' bodies as part of the visual content through their refracted reflections but also evolved a visual component from an earlier Propeller production so as to build upon an overall aesthetic identity.

The knowledge that he will be designing for characters that exist on the fringes of the main action influences Pavelka's choice of scenic materials, which "are often skeletal or semi-transparent so that the actors can appear from as many places as possible or be partially visible in the shadowy corners of the set."<sup>98</sup> *Richard III's* set comprised of the aforementioned open metal gridwork and translucent plastic curtains, and the medical screens were made of white rear projection screens that registered the shadows of figures passing behind them. *The Comedy of Errors'* metal sheeting was opaque, but the gaps between the walls drew attention to the fact they were facades rather than complete structures and left the perimeter of the stage open

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<sup>97</sup> Pavelka, "Designing *The Winter's Tale*," 15.

<sup>98</sup> Quoted in Will Wollen, "Interview with Michael Pavelka," *Richard III* education pack (Propeller: 2001), 18.



for the choric actors to inhabit. Through these gaps, Pavelka encourages the perception that the audience is privy to practitioner space.<sup>99</sup> The skeletal materials which reveal the choric presence on the fringes of the main playing area create a liminal space where the actors are simultaneously read as active participants in the production and performers waiting for their cues to enter the driving action. In *The Comedy of Errors*, for example, a choric character would often be seen positioned upstage with a musical instrument, ready to provide the sound effects which punctuated the production's cartoon violence and accompanied any mention of the gold chain that is accidentally given to Antipholus of Syracuse. In these moments, spectators saw the mechanism by which the production's soundscape was created whereas usually these processes occur backstage or from behind a mixing desk.

Pavelka's aim is to make the spectators, like the actors, feel as if they "know the whole space. [...] They're tracking the performer as much as the character, and I hope what my design gives them the illusion of is that they're in touch with the whole company the whole time."<sup>100</sup> Purcell views such instances where "'backstage' areas may be visible [...] or a representation displayed (costume rails, for example, or out-of-character actors remaining on stage on side benches)" as examples of a "collectivist" attitude towards conceptions of popular theatre since they create the possibility for interplay between the illusionary *locus* and the theatrical *platea*.<sup>101</sup> Though the actor is separated from the audience by virtue of being onstage, he is similarly outside of the main action and can be seen to exist in the world of the physical theatre as opposed to the world of the fictional play.

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<sup>99</sup> McAuley defines "practitioner space" as "the stage door access, the whole backstage area with its dressing rooms, its hierarchy of comfort and discomfort, green room, corridors and stairways, and the stage itself." 26.

<sup>100</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.

<sup>101</sup> Purcell, 193.

The metal gridwork Pavelka has increasingly incorporated into his sets — and which anchored the *Richard III* and *Comedy of Errors* designs — also

gives [lighting designer Ben Ormerod] as much opportunity to side light the actors as possible. As a rule, the set itself is never lit. This gives the performers centrality. The focus of a scene is based more on the balance between ensemble and key characters, rather than key characters and the set.<sup>102</sup>

A notable moment of interplay between Pavelka's scenic materials and Ormerod's lighting designs occurred during scene sixteen of *Richard III*, when Richard (Richard Clothier) awoke from his terrible dream. Sitting on the wooden gurney that had previously served as a throne, Richard fearfully ruminated on his horrific deeds. Lights placed along the edge of the stage constituted the primary source of lighting throughout this scene, producing the same unnerving effect as a flashlight held under someone's chin when telling a ghost story. These lights caused Richard's shadow to be projected on the plastic curtains that had been drawn behind him, and the angle of the light made the shadow huge and gave the appearance that Richard was being haunted by himself. When Ratcliffe (Dugald Bruce-Lockhart) entered, the lighting softened and the monstrous silhouette disappeared. Within this scene, the set and lights combined to create an effect that commented on the mental state of Richard III but was nonetheless linked to the actor's performance through the use of shadow.

Finally, Pavelka uses materials that convey to audiences a sense of honesty. Citing Negri's view of theatre as "a social event, a spiritual event" requiring an audience's "proximity" and "engagement," Pavelka believes this is best accomplished by inviting the audience into the creative process.<sup>103</sup> Using bare materials is another way the audience is made to feel privy to how the production is constructed, which

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<sup>102</sup> Michael Pavelka, email correspondence, 17 May 2015.

<sup>103</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.

leads to the audience's imaginative complicity.<sup>104</sup> According to Pavelka, "pretty much all the materials onstage are familiar: metal is metal, wood is wood, plastic is plastic. There's an integrity to that that the audience can sense. There's a sort of honesty about that." Pavelka's use of terms such as "honesty" and "integrity" speak to a relationship where the audience trusts the performers, confident that they are not being tricked by illusions or artifice. That is not to say Propeller's productions completely eschew illusion — *Richard III*'s gratuitous, illusionistic violence was a departure from the abstracted violence staged in *Henry V* and *Rose Rage* and utilized a copious amount of stage blood — but the overall guiding principle is one of exposing, rather than concealing, the work of a production. If both actor and performer must imagine, for example, the metal scaffolding of *Richard III*'s mobile tower as the stone walls of the Princes' bedroom or Clarence's prison in the tower of London, then performer and spectator are united in the imaginative process. There is a feeling of community that contrasts with a set that appears to be stone from the auditorium but that the actors know to be painted plywood or sculpted foam rubber, which creates a hierarchical compartmentalization of knowledge. In the latter example, the audience is held at arm's length from the creative process, asked to accept an illusion. This can either result in a passive reception of the performance, Brecht's dreaded "culinary theatre," or spectators disregarding the story to concentrate on the mechanics of illusion, wondering what Richard's throne is *really* made of instead of attending to his reflections on power.<sup>105</sup>

Conceived as a "plastic" world for the actors to inhabit and through which the conceptual framework can be communicated to the audience, Pavelka's scenic designs

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<sup>104</sup> Mike Alfreds expresses this view in Purcell, 13.

<sup>105</sup> Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. and ed. John Willet, London: Methuen, 1964, 52.

leave room for adaptation by the acting company through their existence as “toolkits.” The scenic designs invite audiences into the theatre-making process by asking them to perceive the structures through a variety of different lenses and by revealing the ways in which they function, both through Pavelka’s honest use of materials and through the manipulation they experience at the hands of the performers. Similarly, Pavelka’s costume designs are conceived to be read as costumes as opposed to clothes so as to highlight their role in helping to tell a story rather than create a naturalistic world.<sup>106</sup> Pavelka’s work with Hall to create a “generic identity” for the choric presence results in a choric uniform that draws attentions to the shifting roles of the performers at the same time that it creates a cohesive community onstage. The collaborative process between Pavelka and the actors as it relates to these “toolkits” comes not from their creation but their utilization and adaptation. A much more integrated collaboration is present during Pavelka’s design process for Propeller’s costumes, which are heavily influenced by discussions with the acting company. Stage manager Bryony Rutter describes Pavelka’s designs as “witty and practical,” supporting the creation of a performance whose results that are simultaneously playful and functional, never allowing the designer’s cleverness to take precedence over how the design itself works in performance.<sup>107</sup>

## Costume

*One by one, they enter. Slinking out from behind the thick plastic strips that hang down from the downstage corners, leaning against the metal gridwork that frames the stage, or simply standing and staring, as still as the flagpole in the upstage right corner. One sits on a skeletal metal gurney downstage center, balancing his weight on the rough wooden platform. One climbs the gantries that frame the stage. One leans*

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<sup>106</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.

<sup>107</sup> B. Rutter.

*against a metal tower. In their white coats and their white masks, the figures onstage are the descendants of Rose Rage's butchers, but are marked with subtle differences. The animal-like snouts of the butcher masks have been replaced with mournful eye and mouth holes, as if the actors are the last survivors of a terrible, disfiguring fire. Like the butchers, the men hold things in their hands — not knives and cleavers, but hacksaws and syringes — medical paraphernalia from a pre-anesthetic age. Once positioned, the orderlies stand. And watch. And wait.*

The opening moments of 2010's *Richard III* strongly recalled those of 2001's *Rose Rage*, consciously echoing the previous production to situate *Richard III* within Propeller's repertoire of history plays. The choric orderlies were aloof, silent, and menacing in their white coats, creating a uniform presence that hinted at horror movies and ghost stories. *Richard III*'s set evoked *Rose Rage*'s through the use of open metalwork and industrial, geometric lines, and the choric costumes were also strongly evocative of this earlier production. As with *Rose Rage*'s butchers, *Richard III*'s orderlies wore long white coats and white masks, obscuring the actor underneath and creating a blank, faceless figure of neutrality, but these were tailored specifically to *Richard III*'s unique environment of deteriorating sanity. *Rose Rage*'s half-masks gave the butchers the appearance of animals, highlighting the theme of inhuman butchery that Pavelka found compelling. In contrast, *Richard III*'s orderlies' masks carried with them a number of horror associations: children's Halloween costumes, bandages worn by burn victims, and "Scream" — both the painting by Munch as well as the Wes Craven film franchise. This last reference contributed to the production's clever acknowledgement and parody of horror movie tropes, as Propeller's *Richard III* borrowed heavily from the "Hammer horror" playbook, with each subsequent death escalating in its gruesome bloodletting: de-oculation with an electric drill, evisceration with a scythe, and dismemberment with a chainsaw, to name but a few.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Mark Shenton, "Edward Hall's All-Male Propeller Company to Bring Productions to London's Hampstead Theatre and U.S.," *Playbill*, 3 February 2011, <http://www.playbill.com/news/article/edward-halls-all-male-propeller-company-to-bring-productions-to-londons-ham-175790>, accessed 30 December 2014.

Spectators who went to see a matinee of *Richard III* and then stayed to watch *The Comedy of Errors* in the evening would have had a very different first encounter for their second production. Instead of masks, the actors wore aviator sunglasses and sombreros as they lounged across the stage's apron playing instruments, wandered about the stage swigging from a hip flask, or joked with patrons in the foyer. The pristine white medical coats were exchanged for shiny football jerseys in a riot of colors; their ruby red, emerald green, and canary yellow synthetic fabrics paired with jeans in shades of blue. Though the same company of actors performed both plays, the opening moments of each production laid out the productions' contrasts: cold versus warm, monochromatic versus colorful, stillness versus swagger, and ethereal versus tacky.

These contrasts are also evident in a comparison of Pavelka's costume sketches (Figures 8 and 9) for the productions, which demonstrate the same concern with materiality as his scenic storyboards and digital renderings. Over the course of Pavelka's relationship with Propeller, his costume sketches have evolved from simple drawings with handwritten notes (another example of the pencil in the process allowing for change and evolution) to the computer images seen in the designs for *Richard III* and *The Comedy of Errors*. These two sketches show contrasting styles, and Pavelka explains that the differences in the sketches not only reflect the natural evolution of his creative process but also reflect how he views the specific world for which he is designing:

I worry that the way in which I draw something is in conflict with the idea. The physical thing of making the marks has to be compatible with the idea that I'm articulating through making the marks. So those drawings [for *Richard III*] had to be extremely disciplined. *The Comedy of*

*Errors*, [was] totally different. [...] The drawings for those are very, very loose, and many of the characters look loose: improvised.<sup>109</sup>

The sketches for *Richard III* are faceless, anticipating the actor who will wear the clothes but also creating a visual representation of the space left for the actor's input. Without the individual, there is something clearly missing, and so the sketches read as

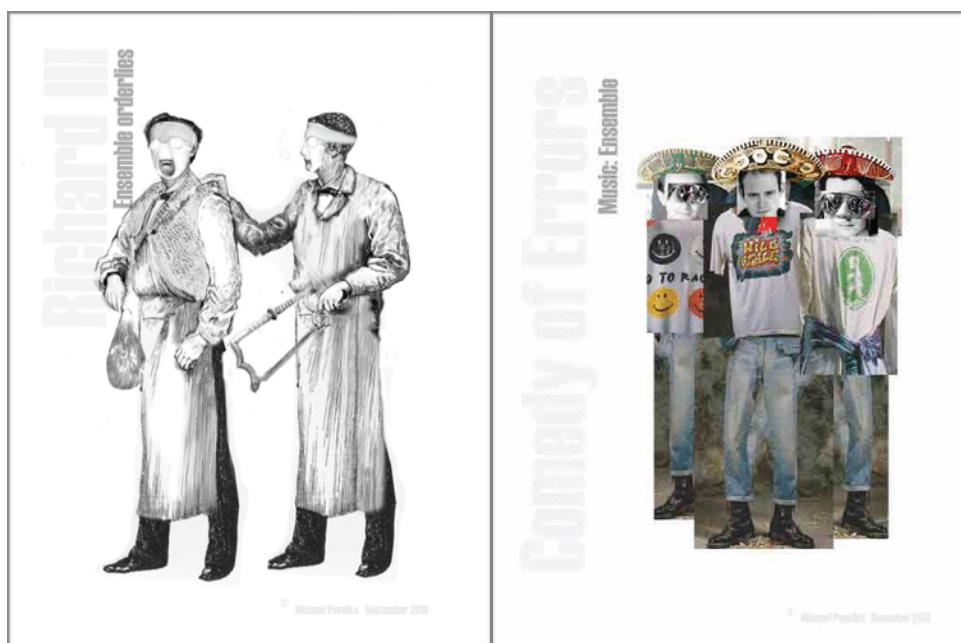


Fig. 8 and Fig. 9, Choric costume designs for *Richard III*'s orderlies (left) and *The Comedy of Errors*' musicians (right). Copyright Michael Pavelka.

works in progress to which the actor can respond. Costumes for *The Comedy of Errors* were designed after the show had been cast, and the face is portrayed by a photograph of the actor, keeping his presence central. The actor's inclusion in Pavelka's sketch is representative not only of the actor in performance but also of his contribution to the design itself, as *Comedy*'s costuming process was largely driven by the actors' suggestions: envelopes were hung around the rehearsal room and the actors filled them with suggestions that Pavelka then sourced.<sup>110</sup> Across the two production, his primary contribution shifted from creator to editor.

<sup>109</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.

<sup>110</sup> Pavelka, "Making the Work of Play," 142; Pavelka, personal interview.

Pavelka's designs serve to highlight both the actors' role in contributing to the overall production conceit (through the uniform chorus) and his individual performance (through the detailed consideration of named characters' wardrobes). Beginning with the function of costumes within Propeller productions, this section will go on to look at choric costumes followed by named character costumes. In the former, the decision is pre-determined and serves the broad goals of Propeller's production style, highlighting the theatrical process and disrupting any attempt by spectators to read the performance as naturalistic. The latter results from a close collaboration with the actors, who are largely known to Pavelka due to the first-refusal casting policy.

Though Pavelka does not explicitly make the connection between his costumes and the Elizabethan theatre, I begin by exploring how Propeller's costumes reflect or reject Elizabethan practice to determine how costuming may be viewed alongside the company's other similarities to early modern theatre. In many ways, costuming encapsulates the two sides of the authenticity debate, and replicating Elizabethan fashions onstage can act as visual shorthand for implying a production carries with it historic accuracy. For example, Jenny Tiramani observed that Shakespeare's Globe's 2000 production of *Hamlet* has been characterized as one of the theatre's "original practice" productions despite the fact that the costumes were the only production component to mimic the look of early modern productions.<sup>111</sup> The association of early modern clothing with "original practice" prioritizes a recreation of early modern performance conditions, but how clothing functioned within these original productions is complicated. Abigail Rokison describes Peachum's sixteenth-century illustration of *Titus Andronicus* in performance as "characters dressed predominantly in

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<sup>111</sup> Jenny Tiramani, "Exploring Early Modern Stage and Costume Design," in *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*, ed. Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 58.



Elizabethan clothing with some concessions towards Roman costume” and refers to Cleopatra’s “laces” in *Antony and Cleopatra* as evidence that early modern clothing was consistently used onstage regardless of the plays’ historical settings.<sup>112</sup> The clothes worn on stage would have been familiar to original audiences, who would have been able to recognize the clothes as symbols of status and occupation. Based on the information we have regarding Elizabethan costuming, the question stands: is it better to design clothes similar to those Shakespeare’s original audiences would have seen or attempt to replicate the meanings these clothes communicated?

Proponents of the former cite production unity as a reason to embrace Renaissance clothing for Shakespeare’s plays. Lucy Barton’s 1967 article “Why not Costume Shakespeare According to Shakespeare?” equated visual “updating” with the potential to “destroy” the plays due to “incongruities between what the actors say and what they have on,” going on to detail a number of instances where clothing references in Shakespeare’s text dictate specific costumes without which “the plot falls to pieces.”<sup>113</sup> Peter Hall echoes this opinion with his assertion that

[u]nless what’s on the stage looks like the language, I simply don’t believe it. Ruritanian or modern or eclectic costume are all very well — I can see why people do that — but if you’re speaking Elizabethan English, to me there’s always a war between the two.<sup>114</sup>

Peter Hall’s statement implies that the conflict between Shakespeare’s text and the visual impact of non-Elizabethan costumes will prevent audiences from viewing a production as a seamless whole, what Barton calls “the flow and unity of the play.”<sup>115</sup>

These views ascribe to costumes’ purpose as contributing to what Aoife Monks terms

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<sup>112</sup> Abigail Rokison, “Authenticity in the twenty-first century: Propeller and Shakespeare’s Globe,” in *Shakespeare in Stages: New Theatre Histories*, eds. Christine Dymkowski and Christie Carson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 83. See also: Tiramani.

<sup>113</sup> Lucy Barton, “Why not Costume Shakespeare according to Shakespeare?” *Educational Theatre Journal* 19, no. 3 (1967), 355, 350.

<sup>114</sup> Quoted in Peter Holland, “Peter Hall,” in *The Routledge Companion to Director’s Shakespeare*, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Routledge, 2008), 141.

<sup>115</sup> Barton, 349.

“the sanctity of illusion.”<sup>116</sup> To this end, Monks continues, “costumes are expected to somehow disappear, so that they don’t interrupt the flow of the character’s presence.”<sup>117</sup> However, neither Barton nor Peter Hall acknowledge that the plays’ original audiences were asked to reconcile the two different visual systems apparent in Peachum’s drawing — the Elizabethan clothing that located the actors within the same era as the audience and the Roman toga that belonged to the fictional world of the narrative.

Pavelka chooses to preserve this visual dissonance by designing costumes that are read as costumes, foregrounding the act of performing in Propeller’s productions.<sup>118</sup> Despite their contrasts, both the orderlies and musicians shown in the costume sketches above share commonalities in their relative modernity and the fact that neither reflects historically accurate representations of a specific era, country, or style. They consciously go against the need to present the unified aural/visual experience outlined by Peter Hall and Lucy Barton. Propeller’s costume designs often reference cultural or historical touchstones that audiences can readily identify, aiding in the storytelling process and helping connect Shakespeare to modern audiences. Pavelka’s costumes align with the second view of authenticity, incorporating modern clothing and “enabling the modern audience to recognize the social status, emotions, or intentions of a character from their clothing,” which “mirrors the use of costume as a signifier on the Renaissance stage.”<sup>119</sup>

Pavelka’s use of recognizable fashions on the stage is not revolutionary — as Monks details in her study *The Actor in Costume*, theatrical costuming has a historically

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<sup>116</sup> Aoife Monks, *The Actor in Costume* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), 10.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid. See also: Stephen Di Benedetto, *An Introduction to Theatre Design* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 100.

<sup>118</sup> “It’s important that even if it’s a recognizable, contemporary piece of clothing, it’s presented as a costume and the audience buys into it as a costume even if it’s very familiar to them.” Pavelka, personal interview.

<sup>119</sup> Rokison, 83.

reciprocal relationship with contemporary fashion.<sup>120</sup> Pavelka's designs for Propeller individualize themselves by how they achieve these functions and what kinds of characters they lend themselves to creating, which, in turn, reflects Propeller's investment as a company in including the audience in the theatrical process. Pavelka's designs primarily draw from the twentieth century, but, similar to his scenic designs, lack specificity. Each production's costumes are impressions of a particular era in order to present a picture of a time in history that is neither related to the plays' origins nor a depiction of current sartorial trends. The fluidity of meaning can be seen in reviewers' interpretations of *Richard III*'s choric presence. Many of the critics who mentioned the figures did not try to positively identify them, referring broadly to white coats and white masks.<sup>121</sup> Those that did try to pinpoint the exact nature of the masked figures provided a range of interpretations: "A lurking chorus, in sinister white face-masks, as if hideously disfigured" (*The Telegraph*), "burn masks" (*Financial Times* and *The Irish Times*), "surgical masks" (*Exeunt*), "face masks made up of bandages" (*The Bardathon*), and "Leatherface masks" (*The Public Reviews: Coventry*).<sup>122</sup>

In all of these descriptions, the reviewer seemed to recognize something within

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<sup>120</sup> Monks, with particular reference to chapter 2, "Dressing the Audience: A History of Fashion at the Theatre," 34-56.

<sup>121</sup> Christopher Adams, "Bloody, bloody Richard III," *PlayShakespeare*, 22 February 2011, <https://www.playshakespeare.com/richard-iii/361-theatre-reviews/5358-bloody-bloody-richard-iii>, accessed 3 June 2015; Charles Spencer, "Comedy of Errors/Richard III, Propeller, Hampstead Theatre, review," *The Telegraph*, 27 June 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/8601611/Comedy-of-ErrorsRichard-III-Propeller-Hampstead-Theatre-review.html>, accessed 3 June 2015; Catherine Love, "Richard III - Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guilford," *The Public Reviews*, 24 November 2010, <http://www.thepublicreviews.com/richard-iii--yvonne-arnaud-theatre-guildford/>, accessed 3 June 2015; Audrey Pointer, "Richard III - Lyceum Theatre, Sheffield," *The Public Reviews*, 26 January 2011, <http://www.thepublicreviews.com/propeller-richard-iii-lyceum-theatre-sheffield/>, accessed 3 June 2015.

<sup>122</sup> Dominic Cavendish, "Richard III/The Comedy of Errors, Sheffield Lyceum, review," *The Telegraph*, 31 January 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-reviews/8293873/Richard-IIIThe-Comedy-of-Errors-Sheffield-Lyceum-review.html>, accessed 3 June 2015; Sarah Hemming, "The Comedy of Errors/Richard III, Hampstead Theatre, London," 27 June 2011, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/a62963f2-a0d9-11e0-adae-00144feabdc0.html>, accessed 3 June 2015; Peter Crawley, "Richard III," *The Irish Times*, 22 July 2011, <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/richard-iii-1.606663>, accessed 3 June 2015; John Murphy, "Richard III," *Exeunt*, January 2011, <http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/richard-iii/>, accessed 3 June 2015; Peter Kirwan, "Richard III (Propeller) @ The Belgrade, Coventry," *The Bardathon*, 10 February 2011, <https://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/bardathon/2011/02/10/richard-iii-propeller-the-belgrade-coventry/>, accessed 3 June 2015; Daniel Kennedy, "Richard III - Belgrade Theatre, Coventry," *The Public Reviews*, 10 February 2011, <http://www.thepublicreviews.com/richard-iii-belgrade-theatre-coventry/>, accessed 3 June 2015.

the mask that made the figure familiar — doctor, burn victim, or horror movie antagonist — but was then required to reconcile his own interpretation with the rest of the production. The costumes required a level of engagement beyond what could have been achieved if the chorus had dressed in a way that made their identity unquestionable. The uncertainty with which the masked figures were greeted contributed to *Richard III*'s central production conceit, which focused on Richard's deteriorating grasp on reality. The football shirts, blue jeans, and aviators similarly contributed to *The Comedy of Errors* thematic interests. The shiny, synthetic quality of the football shirts were indicative of the artificiality of Ephesus, the shades of blue reflective of the ocean that had separated Aegeon's family at the beginning of the story, and the mirrored sunglasses hid the wearer's faces in a subtle nod to the prevailing questions of identity throughout the play.<sup>123</sup> The choric costumes for the two productions further contrasted in the degree of variation found in each production. *Richard III*'s white coats and masks appeared identical while *The Comedy of Errors*' football shirts came in a number of styles.

The level of individuality afforded to the choric costumes depends on the desired tone and the atmosphere that the choric presence helps create. *Richard III*'s orderlies were an otherworldly presence — an instance where the choric aspect in a Propeller production provided an almost supernatural visual component to an otherwise ordinary world.<sup>124</sup> Their identical white coats and masks helped foster this atmosphere through temporarily erasing and dehumanizing the individual actor in order to direct focus to the collective actions of the group. Alongside *Richard III* and *Rose Rage*, this effect has been achieved in a number of Propeller productions. The

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<sup>123</sup> Pavelka, "Making the Work of Play," 142; Pavelka, "Designing *The Comedy of Errors*."

<sup>124</sup> This demonstrates a further connection between Pavelka's work and what Spindler identifies as "Ontological Magic Realism," where "the supernatural is presented in a matter-of-fact way as if it did not contradict reason, and no explanations are offered for the unreal events in the text." Spindler, 82.

choric fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* all wore matching, white, long underwear, waist-trainer corsets, and ballet flats as well as white face paint and drawn-on eyebrows, which gave them a doll-like appearance. In *Twelfth Night*, the chorus was imagined as Feste's "zanies" and wore black suits with white shirts, black ties, and silver half-masks.<sup>125</sup>

In productions whose frameworks are more literal and less metaphorical than those described above, Pavelka grants a degree of personality amongst the chorus. In *The Comedy of Errors*, the variations in football shirts allowed spectators to track performers in a way they could not in *Richard III*, permitting the individual to be seen at the same time that he was marked as part of a larger group. In other productions, the variations amongst the chorus help to establish Shakespeare's stories as plays-within-plays, presenting the actors not as a supernatural force but as regular people coming together to tell a story. *The Taming of the Shrew*, for example, began with an interpolated wedding ceremony. Pavelka dressed the actors in black tuxedos and ruffled shirts that came in a rainbow of sherbet colors, establishing each actor as portraying a wedding guest who then performs the Katherine/Petruchio story as a trick on the drunken groom, Christopher Sly. *Henry V* is another such instance, where the soldiers returning from war came together to perform their experiences for each other. The soldiers all wore the same basic uniform of camouflage pants, combat boots and grey shirts, but the style of the shirts varied from person to person and accessories such as dog tags, gloves, and backpacks gave each man a separate identity.

As well as contextualizing the nature of the story being told, costumes help create the actual fictional world in which that story takes place by marking temporal or geographical transitions. Pavelka described how 2011's *Henry V* set could be

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<sup>125</sup> Michael Pavelka, "Twelfth Night," Michael Pavelka website, <http://www.michaelpavelka.com/twelfth-night/>, accessed 7 July 2015.

variably viewed as “a bunker, an army gym, and a battlefield,” yet the set pieces that comprised these locations remained structurally unaltered throughout the production. While re-positioning these pieces could mark a change in location, the significance of these changes was immediately communicated through changes in the costumes. In the scene where King Henry (Dugald Bruce-Lockhart) confronted the traitors Scroop (Karl Davies), Cambridge (Richard Dempsey), and Grey (Nick Asbury), he descended down a set of stairs from the top of the mobile platform wearing his full dress uniform and a greatcoat. None of the other men wore coats, which indicated the tower and stairs marked an entrance into a sheltered space from the outside, and the formality of the outfit suggested a safe space that allowed for the consideration of appearance and protocol. Later, King Henry once again appeared on the top of the tower, but this time wearing a sweaty undershirt and camouflage trousers, surrounded by similarly dressed soldiers. This second scene, though using the same mobile properties, showed a clear transition from a formal, interior location to a chaotic exterior one in part because of the change in costumes.

The choral identity presents itself in the production’s opening moments, revealing the scenic designs and costumes to the audience independent of the main action of Shakespeare’s text, helpfully “represent[ing] an underlying theme in the drama.”<sup>126</sup> Just as the spectators first encounter a Propeller production through the choric presence, Pavelka and Hall also start conceptualizing a production through imagining the choric identity. According to Pavelka:

[Hall and I] start by imagining [the actors] almost as so many physical blanks, then discovering a ‘design signature’ for the company, a costumed image that gives the ensemble a collective role or presence and that generates a collective voice.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Pavelka, “Designing *Richard III*.”

<sup>127</sup> Pavelka, “Making the Work of Play,” 132.

Speaking on the purpose of choruses generally, Pavelka writes that “designing both a unity and a particularity for the group can give clarity, believability and integrity to the central narrative.”<sup>128</sup> There is remarkably little written on the subject of choric costumes, but Monks’ description of early Russian socialist companies costuming their performers in blue overalls offers insight into the potential effects of choric costuming. As described by Monks, the use of overalls for costumes “attempted to ensure that the audience would engage with the performers as a collective” and “refused full emotional identification with the characters and the narrative in order to retain an engaged understanding of the ideological context of the performance.”<sup>129</sup> Pavelka’s designs allow individual recognition not afforded by the Russian overalls as they also encompass individual costumes for named characters, but the function of the chorus costumes is similar to the effect Monks describes. As each actor is reabsorbed into the chorus throughout the course of the production, his performance is both marked as individual and as supported by the group performance effort. Spectators are asked to recognize the shifts from named character to choric actor, from individuals to a group, and, in doing so, to change repeatedly their frames of reference.

I have been focusing on the choric costumes’ visual impact within a production, but their practical function is also an important part of how Propeller produces Shakespeare’s plays by contributing to an overtly theatrical style. “By giving the company a generic identity, particular to each play,” Pavelka explains, “we can dress actors up and down in full view of the audience to reflect their role, gender, status and so on.”<sup>130</sup> The “generic identity” of the chorus forms the foundation of the individual character costumes which are, in some cases, created “in full view of the

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<sup>128</sup> Pavelka, *So You Want to be a Theatre Designer?*, 27.

<sup>129</sup> Monks, 74.

<sup>130</sup> Pavelka, “Making the Work of Play,” 132.

audience.”<sup>131</sup> In the 2011 *Henry V*, after the Chorus’ opening speech, actors Gunnar Cauthery and Robert Hands drew ecclesiastical robes from the ammunition boxes onstage and put them on while performing the exchange between the Bishops of Canterbury and Ely. Spectators were therefore able to watch the soldiers prepare for their performance as characters within *Henry V*’s narrative. Pavelka’s choric costumes draw attention to the primary work of the costume in performance, which is to mark transitions between roles, statuses, ages, professions, and — in Propeller, especially — gender.<sup>132</sup> There is an element of play in publicizing the act of costuming, and the taking the robes from the ammunition boxes equated the action with putting on items from a child’s dress-up box. However, the impression that Pavelka gives — that the audience is *always* allowed to see the process of putting on character — is an illusion, as the dressing and undressing that occurs onstage is consciously included in the blocking. Similar to the impression Pavelka creates with the set that the audience can track the offstage movements of the actors, the creation of character through clothing is carefully orchestrated throughout the production so that the audiences see just enough to feel included.

Regardless of whether or not the costumes are exchanged in view of the audience, the base costume often remains visible through the production, even as its role as signifier is ceded to that of the named character’s costume. As with the malleability of the scenic designs, the costumes are displayed to the audiences as fluid combinations of pieces. The transition between choric and named role by the actor sometimes involves the complete visual exchange of one costume for the other, such as the white coats in *Richard III*, where the length of the sleeve and the hem almost completely obscured the Victorian formalwear underneath. In other cases the

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Monks, 42, 79.



transition is marked by the addition or subtraction of specific costume pieces which left part of the base costume visible. In *The Comedy of Errors*, for example, the football shirts were swapped with other types of tops to indicate a change in character, but the majority of actors continued to wear the same pair of jeans throughout the production. What emerges is a pattern of using the choric costumes as unders or overs — close-fitting simple costumes that can be worn underneath other clothing or larger single pieces such as coats that can be quickly pulled over the named characters' costumes.<sup>133</sup> Though these changes largely take place offstage, the costumes' visible components recall or anticipate their various combinations so that the acknowledgement of the process of dressing/undressing becomes incorporated into the costumes themselves. Exposing the process by which actors change in and out of costume draws attention to the function of costume in creating meaning. This acknowledgment further incorporates audiences in the theatre making process by marking the identities associated with costumes as transitory.

The layering of different performance identities reminds spectators of the simultaneous presence of actor, chorus member, and named character, and of the interplay among the three. An especially significant moment of intersection between these identities occurred at the end of *Rose Rage*, when Henry VI was killed. As they had done throughout the production, the choric butchers signaled a change of scene and entered the playing space to transition the stage from battlefield to Henry VI's cell in the Tower of London. However, as the butchers exited into the wings, one held back and, once alone with Henry, removed his butcher's mask to reveal the actor's face.<sup>134</sup> This action produced a moment of uncertainty as to how the actor, Richard Clothier, was to be identified by the audience since unmasked butchers had, until this

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<sup>133</sup> Dugald Bruce-Lockhart, personal interview, London, 11 June 2014.

<sup>134</sup> *Rose Rage* prompt book, 119.

point, served as minor characters such as messengers and Cade's rebels. It was not until a few lines into the scene, when Henry pointedly made a reference to "Good Gloucester," that the butcher's identity as the Richard, Duke of Gloucester was made clear. The removing of the mask and Richard's subsequent identification showed within a single exchange the interdependent realities of actor, choric butcher, choric actor, and specific named character. Such a displayed interdependence retroactively called into question the process by which spectators had been identifying characters within the story and Gloucester's function within that story.

Because the choric presence is so vital to establishing the interpretive framework of a production, Pavelka decides on its costumes ahead of the rehearsal process. However, his process for designing a production's named characters is highly collaborative, working with the actors to discover each one's individual persona. The visual embodiment of character is often identified as costume's most important function, whether the style is one of historical reproduction or abstract impressionism.<sup>135</sup> Negri, for example, credited scenic design with creating "a world which enables the play to happen fully and convincingly on all levels, whilst good costume will clarify the strong individuality of the various characters."<sup>136</sup> Pavelka views the role of the costume as not only tracking an individual character's journey but also creating a context for the play's story.<sup>137</sup> Examining the named characters in *Richard III* reveals the various ways in which Pavelka's knowledge and collaboration with Propeller's acting company affects his costume designs and, subsequently, how those designs are read in performance.

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<sup>135</sup> C. Ray Smith, ed., *The Theatre Crafts Book of Costume* (London: White Lion Publishers, 1973), 6, 24, 163; di Benedetto, 99; Motley, *Designing and making stage costumes* (London: Studio Vista, 1964), 94; Pavelka, *So You Want to be a Theatre Designer?*, 9.

<sup>136</sup> Quoted in Burrows, 88.

<sup>137</sup> Pavelka, *So You Want to be a Theatre Designer?*, 9, 11.



**Fig. 10, Richard Clothier as Richard III (2010).  
Copyright Manuel Harlan.**

The style of *Richard III*'s named character costumes was chosen to continue the trajectory of Propeller's previously produced history plays. Pavelka imagines the sartorial timeline of these productions as going backwards, from *Henry V*'s modern military uniforms to *Rose Rage*'s Edwardian morning coats to, finally, *Richard III*'s highly stylized Victorian outfits.<sup>138</sup> The time period evoked by each production provides an impression of an era that was then subsequently deconstructed. The historical importance of the costumes exemplifies how Pavelka draws on the "aesthetic body" to communicate status, behavioral codes, and relationships to contemporary audiences through costume.<sup>139</sup> As Bridget Escolme observes, "Setting a Shakespeare play in another period [...] can smooth out the awkward differences between the two historical periods— Shakespeare's and our own — by imposing another that we think we already understand."<sup>140</sup> Escolme goes on to use the example of Edwardian dress to

<sup>138</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.

<sup>139</sup> Monks, 21.

<sup>140</sup> Bridget Escolme, "Costume," in *Shakespeare and the Making of Theatre*, ed. Stuart Hampton-Reeves and Bridget Escolme (New York: Palgrave, 2012), 136.

show how its use registers to modern audiences as a time that “favours the maintenance of outward appearances over the exposure of inner corruption,” which was exactly what Pavelka hoped to utilized in creating a contrast between the formal, genteel appearance of the nobles and brutal slaughter they then enacted.<sup>141</sup> The connotations of historical dress can also communicate information about a specific character. In *Richard III*, the knowledge of Victorian behavioral codes added significance to Elizabeth’s (Dominic Tighe) increasing dishevelment, as only intense distress could account for a woman of high stature allowing herself to be seen *déshabillée*.

In *Richard III*, the male, named characters were dressed according to their rank and position, in recognizable and seemingly accurate Victorian formalwear, with the exception of the eponymous king. Setting him slightly outside the conventions of the court, Pavelka designed a costume for Richard III (Richard Clothier) that primarily consisted of an anachronistic black military coat. Black leather on his right boot extended from the top of it to Clothier’s knee and was also used along the coat’s right arm, over the shoulder to form the suggestion of a hump. His jacket and boot seemed almost mechanical, connected more with the industrial hospital architecture than its human inhabitants. The mechanized feel was further emphasized by his left arm — ending in a metal, cylindrical appendage that served Richard in a Captain Hook capacity — which had resulted from the collaboration between Clothier and Pavelka.<sup>142</sup> Clothier told Pavelka he hoped to explore “the possibility that [Richard’s] ‘withered hand’ might have some sort of crude prosthetic that might have interchangeable accessories to suit both his social obligations and his nightmarish

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.; Pavelka, personal interview.

<sup>142</sup> Pavelka, “Making the Work of Play,” 140.

cruelty.”<sup>143</sup> In performance, the mechanical arm was used to create darkly humorous moments:

*Scene One: Left alone onstage, and having heard from Hastings both his brothers are suffering and soon to die, Richard excitedly imagines when both will be gone, leaving “a world free to bustle in, for then I’ll marry Lady Anne.” As he says this last bit, he reaches into his stump and pulls out a bouquet of yellow and red flowers with bright green leaves, caressing them as he names Anne “successor to the house of Lancaster.” The audience laughs and Richard seems to hear, for he turns forward and explains “For though I killed her husband and his father” —a slight pause, a slight shrug — “The readiest way to make amends is to become her husband and her father.” As he goes on to explain the necessity of the match, Richard uses the bouquet to gesture to the portions of the stage where, moments ago, the audience had seen Edward suffering from Richard’s poison and Clarence being burned with acid due to Richard’s false intelligence. The comically colorful bouquet (the only use of such brightness in the production) which had elicited laughter from the spectators and the horrible scenes of torture are connected, each having contributing to Richard’s machinations.*

*Scene Five: The large plastic curtain has been drawn across the stage and a single orderly stands center stage, lit from stage right. He begins to sing, and other offstage voices join his as Richard III, Hastings, Buckingham, Elizabeth, and Rivers walk on from stage left. Richard has his right hand over his heart, but the others all carry their jackets over their left arms. They stop in a line and turn to face the audience. Simultaneously, they all begin to roll up their right sleeves, save for Richard. Not having a hand, he makes a half-hearted attempt to push his sleeve up, casting a glance at the four others to see if any notice his difficulty. They don’t. From stage left, beginning with Rivers, each taps the crook of his or her elbow to ready the veins. Rivers: tap, tap. Elizabeth: tap, tap. Buckingham: tap tap. Hastings: tap, tap. Richard: ta— but no, he has no hand with which to ready his arm. He looks from his metal appendage to his arm and back again, and then at the audience before rolling his head in comical exasperation, drawing a laugh from the spectators. Four orderlies enter from stage left with syringes and take their places in front of the nobles, joined by the orderlies already onstage, and turn their backs to the audience. They raise the syringes and draw blood.<sup>144</sup>*

These little jokes made Richard a personable villain in the production’s first half, winning people to his side as he began tallying up the body count. In both, the

<sup>143</sup> Pavelka, “Designing *Richard III*.”

<sup>144</sup> Scene numbers correspond with those in Propeller’s published play text. Edward Hall and Roger Warren, eds., *Propeller Shakespeare: Richard III* (London: Oberon Books Ltd., 2013), 27, 51.

appendage was used to create a moment of connection with the spectators. The first used the laughter caused by the bouquet to draw Richard's attention and focus his explanation of his plans on those who found the concept of Richard-as-wooer humorous. In the second, Richard's inability to participate in the ritualistic preparation for blood drawing set him apart from the nobles, and he turned to the audience for sympathy.

As his actions grew more vicious, the magic tricks disappeared — the only notable instance of the “hand” in the second half was when Richard appeared with an axe attached to the mechanical appendage in preparation for the Battle of Bosworth. Pavelka's openness to Clothier's suggestions gave the individual actor tools with which to develop his performance, as well as affecting the tone of that performance and its potential for black humor. Including the actor in the creation of the costumes prevents the costume design from constituting the actor as a passive signifier of either Hall's or Pavelka's vision and grants him his own agency within performance.<sup>145</sup>

Less historically recognizable were the female characters' costumes, which combined the men's jackets and coats with the large bustles and frills of Victorian skirts. Richard's antagonistic relationship with Margaret, Elizabeth, and his mother made them appear, in his view, monstrous, and the prominent contrast between the masculine and the feminine in costumes for these three characters showed their perceived unnaturalness. Tellingly, the female costume with the least amount of masculine adornment was Lady Anne's — the woman who fails to sustain a combative stance against Richard. Though in keeping with Pavelka's use of both male and female sartorial accents, Anne's costume borrowed less obviously from masculine

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<sup>145</sup> Monks, 68.

fashions. The other three women wore open suit jackets, whose hems ended above the waistline, above waistcoats and buttoned down shirts, which demarcated a clear divide between the halves of the costume. For Anne (Jon Trenchard) Pavelka sought to create a costume that would make obvious Richard's obsessive need to "possess" her, so he designed a costume which would make Trenchard, "as sexy as possible, as curvaceous as possible."<sup>146</sup> Anne's jacket remained tightly buttoned for the whole of the production and was of mid-thigh length, tightly cinched in at the waist so that the heavy fabric flared out, creating the illusion of hips. The skirt was a simple cut but with an exceedingly pronounced bustle, which was all the more prominent due to the lack of additional adornment. The silhouette of the costume achieved Pavelka's aim to create the impression of female sensuality, but its structure was what most affected Trenchard's performance:

The tight, high necked jacket for Lady Anne helped me find a feeling of being trapped. When we first meet her, I think she is caged by the duties of her aristocratic status, her family loyalties and her place in that society as a woman. The bars of her cage are her assets too: her status, family history, and attractiveness as a marriageable woman are her only remaining sources of power. And the Victorian costume gave me that feeling of dignity too. That's where I went with it anyway. The fact that it was fur around the collar also made me feel that the surroundings for that first scene were appropriately cold, bleak and funereal.<sup>147</sup>

Trenchard responded to the costume's impact on his physicality, drawing character inspiration from its constraint that corresponded with Hall's direction "to play her like she's not letting any of her emotion out at all."<sup>148</sup> In this example, the actor drew from the costume as opposed to the costume coming from the actor, which is illustrative of Trenchard's preference to work with options provided him, demonstrating how

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<sup>146</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.

<sup>147</sup> Jon Trenchard, personal interview, London, 12 June 2014.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

Pavelka's design process varies slightly according to how the actor approaches his performance.<sup>149</sup>

Pavelka's costume design for Anne sought to communicate a specific view of the character and did so by creating the character's female silhouette around the actors' male body. However, the redressing of sex is only the beginning of how *Richard III*'s designs functioned as costumes specific to a particular actor. Richard III's mechanical arm came from Clothier's description of Richard III as a "fiddler crab," while actor Tony Bell's discussions with Pavelka focused on Pavelka's perception of Queen Margaret as a withered black beetle. Though Bell has a long history with Propeller, appearing in twelve productions, this was the first time he was cast in a female role. Moreover, the grave, vengeful Margaret was a marked departure for the actor who had previously portrayed Bottom, Autolycus, Feste, Tranio, and Jack Cade. Bell was concerned with communicating Margaret's advanced age through his performance, and Pavelka wanted to find a way to dress Bell that would concentrate his movement and keep him "still."<sup>150</sup> These joint concerns resulted in a number of design choices that affected Bell's movement and altered his usual, boisterous performance style. At Bell's request, Margaret was given a cane, which Bell leaned on to center himself and produced a kind of palsy in his hands.<sup>151</sup> The skirt of the costume was heavily layered "so he was kind of pulled to the floor and he had to make a special effort to move from one place to another."<sup>152</sup> The costume altered Bell's movement and thereby allowed Bell to concentrate on his vocal quality and "on very a particular action."<sup>153</sup> Another request of Bell's, black lace gloves, gave him a visual

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Bell, personal interview; Pavelka interview.

<sup>151</sup> Bell, personal interview.

<sup>152</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.



reminder of his character whilst onstage, with the fragility of the lace communicating physical fragility without Bell needing to incorporate frailty into his performance. The process was keenly receptive to Bell's own ideas and preferences, and Bell credits this flexibility with contributing to creating performances that feel organic to the actors.<sup>154</sup> The effect Pavelka's work has on an actor's movement and performance speaks to his view of design as a kinetic, physical field, whose job it is to actively contribute to performance. The account of his collaboration with Bell takes this consideration one step further as the design interacts with the production as a whole as well as with the known physicality of the individual actor.

The collaboration between designer and performer is a central component to Pavelka's design process and one that is becoming more and more common in contemporary theatre, but it has not always been prioritized. The move towards true collaboration between designer and performer took some time to materialize in twentieth-century theatre, despite earlier recognition of the need to consult with actors such as that found in a 1968 costume handbook credited to Motley:

The actor should be given the chance of seeing costume designs as early as possible; they may have an effect on the way he thinks of the part, or he may have very strong feelings that the costume will not help him get the character he wants. His feelings and ideas should be most carefully considered and discussed with the producer and himself and incorporated into the design whenever possible.<sup>155</sup>

A survey of performer-written essays in Robert Smallwood's *Players of Shakespeare* series shows the trend of the 1980s and early 1990s to begin rehearsals with costume designs presented as pre-determined and with actors viewing their costumes as possible obstacles to overcome in creating their performances.<sup>156</sup> While the actors surveyed in

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<sup>154</sup> Bell, personal interview.

<sup>155</sup> Motley, 16.

<sup>156</sup> Jackson and Smallwood, 55, 142-143; Robert Smallwood, ed., *Players of Shakespeare 4: Further Essays in Shakespearean performance by players with the Royal Shakespeare Company*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 104.

these volumes largely reflect on their experiences with the RSC, their views on the design process is general and speaks to their broad experience in the theatre rather than their time with the RSC specifically. A counter-example can be found in *Players of Shakespeare 3*, which is dominated by remembrances of Adrian Noble's production of *The Plantagenets*. This history cycle enjoyed an unusually long rehearsal period and so afforded an opportunity for costume designs to grow organically from the rehearsal process — a fact that was praised by the actors who were a part of the productions.<sup>157</sup> The corresponding relief and wonder that marked instances where collaboration is possible, or where designers were willing to amend their designs for the actor, illustrates how unusual close collaboration between performer and designer was through the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>158</sup>

The three examples from *Richard III* begin to illustrate how Pavelka collaborates with Propeller's actors to create costumes that support their work in performance, even in cases where decisions regarding costumes are made before casting has been completed. Motley's costume handbook referred to designing ahead of casting choices, leaving room to adjust costumes according to the actor's body and sensibilities but still starting with a framework in hand.<sup>159</sup> Likewise, Pavelka begins with a framework but then employs a variety of methods to ensure his designs work with and not against the actors' developing performance. *Richard III*'s costumes were initially conceived by Pavelka, who then collaborated with the actors to adjust them according to their individual preferences. For *The Comedy of Errors*, the actors were given a huge amount of freedom, as costumes were sourced based on images the actors supplied during rehearsal. Even in a production such as *A Midsummer Night's*

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<sup>157</sup> Jackson and Smallwood, 102, 116-118.

<sup>158</sup> Robert Smallwood, ed., *Players of Shakespeare 6: Essays in the Performance of Shakespeare's History plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 57, 164.

<sup>159</sup> Motley, 8.

*Dream*, which Pavelka described as “absolutely buttoned-down,” he still described a process that left room for the actor to change the design: “I drew a lot in rehearsals [...] to make sure I could enhance each actor’s physicality and use a minimum of effort to achieve my aims.”<sup>160</sup> Pavelka’s description of editing his costume designs based on rehearsal feedback privileges their functionality, just as his scenic designs are adjusted to achieve maximum practicality in performance. Though *Midsummer* was more prescriptive than other instances where the costumes are developed in consultation with the actors, Pavelka’s concern that they “enhance each actor’s physicality” still acknowledges the individual actor’s capacity to affect Pavelka’s design outcome. These examples show how the pressures of working in the commercial theatre need not prohibit collaborative creation.

While the basic respect for the performers’ work is carried through all of Pavelka’s work, the consistency of Propeller’s acting company and Pavelka’s long personal history with the actors for whom he is designing lead to closer collaboration with Propeller actors than he experiences on other projects, despite Pavelka’s attempts to apply some of the same principles.<sup>161</sup> Because of the first-refusal casting policy, at least a third of any Propeller cast is comprised of actors Pavelka has worked with before, and problems with designing for unknown actors are decreased. Pavelka not only designs for a known production remit but also for the individual performer as well:

I know their shape, the sound of their voice, hair colour and shoe size — I’m working with friends rather than colleagues. [...] Ultimately, mutual trust is the essential ingredient; particularly if you’re talking about engineering what amounts to a character transplant or, for some, a public sex change!<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Pavelka, personal interview.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Michael Pavelka, “The Costumes,” Propeller Play, <http://propeller.org.uk/play/pocket-henry-v#/costume/read>, accessed 8 July 2015.

Starting with a knowledge of the actors allows Pavelka to anticipate and incorporate their needs into his designs, while they can trust that the scenic and costume elements they will be working with will support their performances. The first part of Pavelka's statement focuses on the visual cohesion of the design and the physical attributes of the performer and also includes "the sound of their voice" as a consideration in his process. Pavelka indicates that the entire performer is considered as an influence in the costume design — the first step in a longer collaborative process that extends throughout the rehearsal process and even into the public performances. Though the ways in which the sets are used change throughout the rehearsal process, the scenic components themselves remain the same (save for slight adjustments to dimensions and construction). In contrast, the costume designs are constantly being reconsidered and are more easily changed than scenic elements throughout the rehearsal process.

Additionally, actors who have worked with Pavelka know that costume elements can be adapted in conversation with Pavelka as specific performances evolve. This balance between the collective needs of the company/production and the individual talents, preferences, and requirements of the actor is a constant theme in the creation of ensemble companies and how they function within rehearsal. The first two chapters of this project have addressed Propeller's formation and its aesthetic environment. In the next chapter, I examine the acting company and the process by which it turns the frameworks provided by Hall and Pavelka into fully realized Shakespeare productions.

## Chapter 3: Propeller's Acting Company

### The Propeller Ensemble

In 2002, as *Rose Rage* was touring internationally, Edward Hall was to direct *Edward III* for the Royal Shakespeare Company's Jacobean season in the Swan Theatre. Forty-eight hours before rehearsals were to begin, Hall walked out on the production. The problem was casting. Gregory Doran, who was in charge of the Swan season, reacted to Hall's departure:

He left, as I understand it, because he couldn't cast the title role in *Edward III* precisely as he wished. But casting in a five-play season is necessarily a collaborative process. You don't always get your first choice, because people are unavailable, and you obviously have to fit in with the demands of other directors. It's a process that takes time, patience and a certain pragmatism.<sup>1</sup>

Doran's statement attributes Hall's decision to Hall's unwillingness to work within the collaborative environment of the RSC's multi-play season, but Hall's own account cited "a degree of confusion and disorganisation within the company," which led to incomplete casting: "I was expected to start rehearsing without the full cast and I seemed to be the only person who thought that was unacceptable."<sup>2</sup> The title role of *Edward III* remained unfilled, a role that David Rintoul, cast in the part after Hall's departure, described as "very long and [...] very challenging".<sup>3</sup>

Since artistic director Adrian Noble's announcement of Project Fleet on May 25, 2001, the RSC had been seen by many in the theatre community as moving away

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Michael Billington, "Something rotten in Stratford," *The Guardian*, 6 March 2002, 20.

<sup>2</sup> Dominic Cavendish, "Why I Quit the RSC," *The Telegraph*, 6 June 2002, 18.

<sup>3</sup> The exact timeline of Hall's departure is unclear, but the subsequent casting of David Rintoul as *Edward III* is addressed in Rintoul's essay on the part in *Players of Shakespeare 6*. Rintoul recounts how he was rung by his agent on Friday, March 1, 2002 and asked what he knew about the play. Rintoul's knowledge at that point was limited to the play's inclusion in the Swan's Jacobean season and "that it was going to be directed by Ed Hall [...] but that there had been problems and he'd pulled out." After a flurry of phone calls, Rintoul accepted the part that evening and joined the rehearsal process on Wednesday, March 6, 2002. David Rintoul, "Edward III," in *Players of Shakespeare 6: Essays in the Performance of Shakespeare's History Plays*, ed. Robert Smallwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 68-70.

from the company's founding ensemble principles towards an ad-hoc commercial foundation devaluing the personal aspects of theatrical production.<sup>4</sup> Changes instituted by Noble included shortening actors' contracts, moving towards smaller cast sizes, and reducing crossover between productions.<sup>5</sup> The proposed changes brought controversy and public outcry: Bectu union members threatened to strike in August 2001 and both Terry Hands and governor John Mortimer had resigned.<sup>6</sup> In this context, Hall's departure was seen as the latest in a string of reactions against Noble's new policies.<sup>7</sup>

The primary reason given for Project Fleet's changes was the difficulty the RSC had in finding actors willing to take on the longer contracts required by the ensemble system, a problem that had plagued the company since the original instigation of such contracts in 1960. The RSC chose to address these issues through top-down organizational changes, but such changes were seen as moving away from the RSC's founding goal of forming a stable company of committed actors.<sup>8</sup> The high number of redundancies caused by the changes, many resulting from abandoning the Barbican as the company's London home; the lack of opportunity for discussion and negotiation before the changes were announced; and a sense that repercussions would be felt by actors and employees who spoke out against the changes all contributed to a

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<sup>4</sup> In exploring where Noble had gone wrong, Katherine Duncan-Jones cited *The Wars of the Roses* as the high standard of ensemble from which the RSC, under Noble, had fallen. "Adrian's Fall," *The New Statesman*, 25 June 2001, <http://www.newstatesman.com/node/140618>, accessed 7 July 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Miriam Gilbert, "The Leasing-Out of the RSC," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2002), 513 - 514.

<sup>6</sup> Dominic Cavendish, "Lord, what fools these mortals be!," *The Telegraph*, 30 March 2002, [http://www.thetelegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3575356/Lord-what-fools-these-mortals-be.html://www.thetelegraph.co.uk), accessed 13 April 2005; Kate Kellaway, "Boyd fills the void," *The Observer*, 13 April 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2003/apr/13/features.review37>, accessed 13 April 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Luke Leitch, "Director quits over RSC changes," *London Evening Standard*, 5 March 2002, <http://www.standard.co.uk/goingout/theatre/director-quits-over-rsc-changes-6308723.html>, accessed 13 April 2015; David Benedict, "Is the RSC in safe hands?," *The Observer*, 31 March 2002, <http://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2002/mar/31/featuresreview.review1>, accessed 13 April 2015.

<sup>8</sup> Writing in 1964, Peter Hall identified all of his organization changes at the RSC as resulting from his conviction that he "could contribute little unless [he] could develop a company with a strong permanent nucleus." "Shakespeare and the Modern Director," in *Royal Shakespeare Company 1960-1963*, ed. John Goodwin (London: Max Reinhardt Ltd., 1964), 43-44.

pervasive feeling that Noble's RSC no longer cared about its people so much as its profit margin.<sup>9</sup> Given that Hall's work with Propeller has always been centered on the importance of the actor, his departure from *Edward III* might be read as reflection on his views regarding the RSC's changing policies.

I begin with Hall's departure from *Edward III* because it illustrates some of the themes of this chapter: balancing the individual and collective needs, how a company's organization potentially affects its creative environment, and the value in maintaining a sense of personal connectedness amongst members of a company. Because of the frequency with which a discussion of Propeller's working practices invokes the word "ensemble," an investigation of the term will aid this chapter in describing how Propeller's organizational structure impacts its creative process. In the example of Project Fleet, criticism of Noble's policies often defined ensemble by what it is not: it is *not* the individual, *not* the impersonal, *not* the business-oriented organizational model Noble sought to impose. At the same time, what ensemble *is* is difficult to pinpoint. Taken from the French word for "together," it is a theatrical term often used and variably interpreted. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as "all the parts of anything taken together so that each part is considered only in relation to the whole," which applies the word not to the process but to the product.<sup>10</sup> But it can also describe the working environment leading to such a product, as shown in Peter Hall's belief that ensembles encourage members in a "spirit of sharing, and support, and understanding of a common goal, and actually assisting each other on the stage

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<sup>9</sup> Vanessa Thorpe, "Defiant RSC director attacks 'snobbery' and 'insulting' critics," *The Guardian*, 25 November 2001, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2001/nov/25/arts.highereducation>, accessed 15 April 2014; Peter Holland, "Shakespeare's Two Bodies," in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, eds. Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 51; Benedict.

<sup>10</sup> "Ensemble, adv. and n.," Def. B.1.a, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, online version (Oxford University Press, June 2015), accessed 7 July 2015.

in performance.”<sup>11</sup> The variety of definitions and applications has allowed each company that considers itself to be an ensemble to define the term in its own way, using it to describe anything from a multi-tiered organization to a component of a specific production.<sup>12</sup> The RSC cites contract length and casting across multiple productions within a season as key aspects of its ensemble companies, but does not use the term as frequently to describe rehearsal practices, pay equity, or specific production elements.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, Joint Stock, an artist’s collective formed in the 1970s, evolved to a point where all artistic decisions were made collectively, concentrating on commissioning and performing pieces where all company members could feel they had made an equal contribution.<sup>14</sup>

In trying to define what precisely the term “ensemble” denotes, there emerge two primary approaches: either to focus on the feeling it engenders among its participants or to concentrate on its methodology. These two approaches to understanding ensemble divide the two halves of this chapter, which first examines Propeller’s organizational structure before going on to examine the work that occurs within the rehearsal room.

This division also allows the chapter to follow a roughly chronological path, beginning with the company’s formation at the Watermill and how the rural environment of the small Newbury theatre laid the foundation for the company’s interpretation of ensemble ideals. This interpretation is exemplified in the first-refusal policy, which has created an organizational structure echoing beneficial “family” terminology and engendering feelings of engagement, commitment, and loyalty. The

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<sup>11</sup> Peter Hall, “Chekov, Shakespeare, the Ensemble and the Company,” *New Theatre Quarterly* 11, no. 43 (1995), 207-208.

<sup>12</sup> Dan Friedman, “ENSEMBLE ACTING COMPANIES: A Different Kind of Life in the Theatre,” *Back Stage* 44, no. 24 (13 June 2003, 24-27; John Britton, ed., *Encountering Ensemble* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) 5-10.

<sup>13</sup> Royal Shakespeare Company, *The Histories* program (Stratford-upon-Avon: Courtyard Theatre, 2007), 12.

<sup>14</sup> Rob Ritchie, ed., *The Joint Stock Book: The Making of a Theatre Collective*, (London: Methuen, 1987), 18, 21-23.



equation of “ensemble” with “family” is a useful comparison when considering how ensembles create a spirit of shared investment amongst their participants. The first half of the chapter looks at how Propeller’s organization developed, focusing on the kinds of people the company has attracted and retained as its members, followed by how these people populate a Propeller production through an examination of casting within the company. Cross-gender casting concludes the chapter’s examination of how company policies affect Propeller in performance.

Moving away from family terminology, the second half of this chapter focuses on the methods used by the Propeller ensemble, highlighting the similarities between the rehearsal room and the classroom. In chapter 1, the chorus served as a tool to display Hall’s interpretive framework, and in chapter 2 the chorus illustrated how Pavelka’s designs focused on the bodily presence of the actor. In this chapter, the chorus is primarily explored through its function in the rehearsal room and how it keeps all of the actors engaged with the creation and performance of each production. The chorus also is responsible for Propeller’s musical scores which are written and performed by the acting company and which expand leadership opportunities, providing the actors with a plethora of opportunities to adopt the position of director/teacher throughout the rehearsal process. Moving from the unified choral presence to the individual performance, the chapter concludes by examining how the “rules” of Shakespearean verse speaking are first taught to and then adapted by the Propeller actors to interpret and create Shakespeare’s characters onstage.

## The Propeller Family

To its actors, Propeller as “family” implies a close relationship between individuals and between the actor and the company as a whole. Actors Jon Trenchard, James Tucker, and Dugald Bruce-Lockhart connect the idea of family to a sense of connectivity that persists regardless of contact between the individuals, drawing on their experiences as long-standing members who have re-joined the company after absences.<sup>15</sup> Actors Joseph Chance and Dan Wheeler both joined Propeller in 2012, but still recognize the family atmosphere within the company despite their statuses as newer members.<sup>16</sup> These references exist within a larger discourse regarding the notion of family as comparable to the theatrical ensemble.<sup>17</sup> American professors Rose Burnett Bonczek and David Storck, both of whom also direct professionally, identify “family” as the “first ensemble” in which we, as humans, participate.<sup>18</sup> From this notion of family, Burnett Bonczek and Storck draw a number of key components of ensemble theatre, including feelings of safety, support, responsibility, and reliability which encourage successful theatre production.<sup>19</sup> Though Duška Radosavljević feels “the notion of ‘ensemble as family’ does seem to belong to an age of political idealism which has long been replaced by other realities,” it nonetheless is positively referenced throughout her volume of interviews with ensemble theatre-makers.<sup>20</sup> Peter Hall views the word as connoting the same ideas of “growth, security, confidence, [and]

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<sup>15</sup> Jon Trenchard, personal interview, London, 12 June 2014; James Tucker, personal interview, Stratford-upon-Avon, 12 February 2014; Dugald Bruce-Lockhart, personal interview, London, 11 June 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Chance, personal interview, 13 February 2014; Catherine Vondelebur, “Shakespeare actor is living the dream,” *Birmingham Post*, 7 February 2014, <http://www.birminghampost.co.uk/whats-on/arts-culture-news/shakespeare-theatre-troupe-propeller-comes-6671309>, accessed 7 July 2015.

<sup>17</sup> John Britton, ed., *Encountering Ensemble* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 14–15.

<sup>18</sup> Rose Burnett Bonczek and David Storck, *Ensemble Theatre Making: A Practical Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–10.

<sup>20</sup> Joanna Holden sees it as the result of people spending a significant amount of time with one another, resulting in “a great sense of working together,” which is independent from the individual’s personal history with the company, and Adriano Shaplin considers his Riot Theatre Group a “surrogate family.” Though Ian Morgan initially avoids the term, he still uses it to parallel the “social structure” and “shared histories” of the ensemble. Duška Radosavljević, *The Contemporary Ensemble: Interviews with theatre-makers* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 15, 114–115, 145, 119.

continuity” that characterize ensemble practice.<sup>21</sup> When talking about his participation in the RSC History Cycle, Tucker referred to that specific company as a “family,” compartmentalizing the work of one group of individuals and separating it from the organization as a whole.<sup>22</sup> Again and again, the term “family” is employed by theatre practitioners as shorthand to communicate a sense of connection with their fellow theatre makers that goes beyond imposed business relationships.<sup>23</sup> By referring to the company as a “family,” Propeller’s members draw upon these perceptions of the familial relationship as conducive to creativity and trust.

However, there are dangers associated with applying a family dynamic to a business organization, dangers which Propeller must navigate. Negative connotations focus on a family’s stratified structure and its potentially dysfunctional dynamic, which can inhibit a company’s effectiveness. Dan Rothenberg, co-artistic director of Philadelphia’s Pig Iron Theatre Company, specifically attempts to avoid the “toxic” family dynamic that can occur when people work together for too prolonged a time.<sup>24</sup> Colin Chambers uses the term to describe the RSC of the 1980s as a patriarchal society where the authoritarian “fathers” are kept happy by their children as part of a hierarchical organizational structure.<sup>25</sup> In a study of the changes wrought on the RSC by Project Fleet, results showed that a family atmosphere meant “members of staff expected the organisation to be indulgent and forgiving, and there was an inherent resistance to change.”<sup>26</sup> Noble’s tenure at the RSC ended with employees feeling

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Hewison, John Holden and Samuel Jones, *All Together: A Creative Approach to Organisational Change* (Demos: 2010), [http://www.demos.co.uk/files/All\\_Together.pdf](http://www.demos.co.uk/files/All_Together.pdf), accessed 16 June 2014, 55.

<sup>22</sup> Tucker, personal interview.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Cohen traces the use of “family” in theatre to the presence of literal familial connections in theatrical enterprises of the Dark Ages and Renaissance. *Working Together in Theatre: Collaboration and Leadership* (London: Palgrave, 2011), 3-5.

<sup>24</sup> In this instance, Rothenberg is talking about a claustrophobic, exclusive, working relationship. He goes on to describe Pig Iron’s attempts to avoid such an environment as “a balancing act between maintaining contact with one another so that we can keep working and building our vocabulary together, and giving everybody space to do things which not everyone was interested in.” Quoted in Radosavljević, *The Contemporary Ensemble*, 128

<sup>25</sup> Colin Chambers, *Other Places: New Theatre in the RSC* (London: Methuen, 1980), 17-18.

<sup>26</sup> Hewison, Holden and Jones, 40.

neglected and unheard, particularly because his organizational changes compromised the understanding of the RSC's existing "family" feeling. While Michael Boyd's comments as Noble's successor to the artistic directorship held a promise of returning to "ensemble" principles, he resisted the label of "family" to describe the company, perhaps to protect against backlash to future organizational changes: "I don't usually talk about the RSC as a family [...] We're not a family, we're not related, we're colleagues."<sup>27</sup> Boyd explicitly separates the impression of a biological connection — "We're not related" — from the reality of actors as "colleagues," which implicitly emphasizes the importance of a good working relationship amongst actors.

"Family" provides a way of looking at an ensemble through the relationship it forms among participants, and its two contrasting applications to theatrical ensembles define the balance Propeller must strike between creating a company atmosphere that engenders trust and investment and one that effectively produces high quality Shakespeare productions. Its usage broadly defines the company's group dynamics, but it is also necessary to briefly consider how family impacts the stratification of leadership roles. In the examples above, the tendency is to show a "family" as led by authoritarian or nurturing parental figures in the roles of the theatrical director. Viewing the director as the company's "parent" places the director in a position that can be used to dictate precise terms of behavior or to provide an example his "children" can choose to follow.<sup>28</sup> Edward Hall more closely reflects the second interpretation. Propeller began as an exploration of his personal ideas, and so he could arguably be seen as its father figure. However, the relationship between Hall and the actors, especially in regards to Propeller's original members, is complicated by

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Radosavljević, *The Contemporary Ensemble*, 40.

<sup>28</sup> Bonczek and Storck directly related their own interest in directing to this view of the parental director: "We direct so we can create positive family experiences," 9.

Hall's willingness to cede control to his actors. Entire set pieces, such as the "Single Ladies" dance number discussed later in this chapter, may be devised without Hall's input or supervision. He is never identified as a father by his actors when discussing the family dynamic, and anecdotes from the company's early days position Hall not in a parental role, but as a peer. The key difference is that Hall retains editorial control, amending or rejecting ideas that do not serve the overall productions. Paradoxically, this allows actors greater freedom to experiment than if there was no supervision, as it allows them to play in the rehearsal room with the confidence that there is a safety net in place.<sup>29</sup>

Hall's role within Propeller was, in part, defined by the conditions surrounding the company's formation at the Watermill Theatre. Exploring the Watermill's environment and its impact on the relationships within Propeller begins to reveal how the sense of personal loyalty and investment found amongst company members was encouraged, providing a foundation of trust upon which the work of the rehearsal room is built.

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### **At the Watermill**

The Propeller family was established at the Watermill Theatre, which provided the company with a home for the first thirteen years of its existence. When positioning the ensemble as a family, Bonczek and Stourk emphasize the importance of creating a "home" for the ensemble, differentiating between the physical "home" of the material rehearsal space which must respond to the ensemble's needs and the "psychic home" which provides a safe space that encourages risk-taking.<sup>30</sup> What constitutes a

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<sup>29</sup> Bell, personal interview; Cavendish, "Why I quit the RSC."

<sup>30</sup> Bonczek and Stourk, 10-11.

company or production's home varies, but John Britton observes that, "A recurring feature of many ensemble practices has been the decision to move entire companies away from the habitual routines and perceived 'distraction' of urban life, relocating them to rural environments," wherein the practitioners are given the opportunity to "replace the familiar with the unfamiliar, to identify and deconstruct habitual reactions and behaviours."<sup>31</sup> At the turn of the century in Russia, Konstantin Stanislavsky hoped to bring together like-minded people who would dedicate themselves to the craft of the theatre and provided communal housing to foster a sense of shared community.<sup>32</sup> Jacques Copeau brought his company to his family home in the country to seek "a natural simplicity and spontaneity" through training which combined theatrical warm-ups with athletic activity.<sup>33</sup> Ariane Mnouchkine's Theatre du Soleil was founded in 1964 as an artist's co-operative, where farm duties coincided with theatre-making, reflecting Mnouchkine's belief that "creative unity could only be achieved with a proper sense of collective responsibility."<sup>34</sup> When working in Russia, Declan Donnellan takes his actors "into the woods" for a portion of the rehearsal period so as to "get them away to experiment."<sup>35</sup> The American Group Theatre, London's Group Theatre, Peter Brook's CIRT, and Britton's own DUENDE company are more examples of companies who have employed rural retreats in their theatrical practice so as to develop their processes.<sup>36</sup> In the creation of

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<sup>31</sup> Britton, 285, 289.

<sup>32</sup> Marc Slonim, *Russian Theatre: From the Empire to the Soviets* (London: Methuen, 1963), 108-109;

<sup>33</sup> John Rudlin, "Jacques Copeau: The quest for sincerity," in *Twentieth Century Actor Training*, ed. Alison Hodge (London: Routledge, 2000), 56.

<sup>34</sup> Alycia Smith-Howard, *Studio Shakespeare: The Royal Shakespeare Company at The Other Place* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 9.

<sup>35</sup> Emma Hogan, "Two's a company," *Financial Times*, 10 February 2012, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/0ba38880-5290-11e1-9f55-00144feabdc0.html>, date accessed 14 April 2015. See also: Jane Edwardes, "Declan Donnellan," *TimeOut London*, 15 May 2007, <http://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/declan-donnellan-interview>, date accessed 14 April 2015.

<sup>36</sup> Britton, 285-290.

these conscious communities, the physical and psychic homes described by Bonczek and Stourk are one and the same.

Unlike the early communities formed by Stanislavsky and Copeau, Propeller's formation at the Watermill was born of opportunity rather than ideology. Hall was not actively seeking a location which would eliminate urban distractions and free the actors' creativities, but came to the Watermill because of the creative freedom promised him by Artistic Director Jill Fraser. Nonetheless, the Watermill's own family atmosphere proved influential in engendering a feeling of camaraderie amongst the actors who worked with Hall in those early productions, forming the foundation for Propeller's identity as an ensemble company. Fraser and her husband James Sargeant, who served as the theatre's company manager, lived in an old farmhouse adjacent to the theatre itself and served as a parental presence to the young artists the theatre attracted. When Fraser died in 2006, Hall was one of the many practitioners who came forward in tribute of her achievements, crediting her as Propeller's co-founder and detailing the inviting atmosphere she was responsible for creating at the theatre:

Everyone who worked at the Watermill felt like part of her extended family. She made the theatre a place where you could live and breathe the piece of work you were creating and her house was always full of actors who roomed with her whilst working. Everyone will remember Fraser's tradition of making a huge meal for the entire cast and crew to be enjoyed late at night at the end of the technical rehearsal.<sup>37</sup>

In Hall's testimony, he describes how Fraser's maternal presence was complemented by a willingness to involve herself in every aspect of the theatre, from "coping with blocked drains" to "attending a dress rehearsal, a critical funding meeting or a Broadway opening of her latest production."<sup>38</sup> Fraser's provision of a safe,

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<sup>37</sup> Edward Hall, "Jill Fraser," *The Independent*, 1 June 2006, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/jill-fraser-480564.html>, accessed 18 June 2015.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

encouraging atmosphere coupled with her deep engagement with all levels of a production served as an ideal environment in which to form an ensemble company. If Propeller can be considered a family unit, as it often is described by its actors, then it is possible to view it as part of the extended Watermill family headed by Fraser.

The safe psychic space provided by Fraser was complemented by the Watermill's physical structure, a former watermill transformed into an intimate theatre space. The theatre building is made of brick, its front-facing facade dotted with white framed windows, crawling ivy, and a wooden staircase to the left which leads away from the main entrance on the far right. There, wooden accents frame the shallow staircase leading up to the foyer, which is just visible through a set of large glass windows. Inside the foyer, a central spiraling staircase leads to the circle level and more large windows provide a view of the theatre's grounds. The lawns are dotted with wooden benches, and iron patio sets. There is a bar and restaurant to the right of the main entrance, providing a common meeting place for patrons and performers.

The road leading to the Watermill is paved, single-lane, and unlined with red brick houses and rich green lawns on the left and the River Lambourn on the right. For those who have a car, it is an approximately an hour-long journey from London to the theatre's small car park. Attempting to reach the theatre via public transport is more difficult than driving. Trains to Newbury leave at eighteen minutes past the hour from London Paddington, or one can choose to leave on the thirty-six and transfer in Reading. Both journeys take approximately one hour, and then there remains the task of getting from the Newbury station to the theatre. Taxis are recommended because the bus service is almost non-existent, as exhibited by the lengthy and convoluted instructions provided by the theatre's website:



The nearest bus stop is approximately fifteen minutes' walk away at Station Road, Speen. Newbury Buses service 4 (out and return) runs every two hours, Monday to Saturday from Newbury Bus Station to Station Road, Speen (approximately 30 minutes' walk to The Watermill). The last bus to central Newbury leaves Station Road at 19.30pm. Please be aware there are no pavements for approximately half of this route and no street lighting. Buses run every two hours.<sup>39</sup>

The last train leaves at 11:17pm, arriving at London Paddington at 12:40am. The lengthy and inconvenient commute means that most actors choose to live “on-campus,” as it were, in Newbury during the run of a production, placing cast members in continued close contact with one another outside of the rehearsal rooms.<sup>40</sup>

The geographical isolation of the theatre increased the contact actors had with each other outside of rehearsals, leading to social bonding which contributed to building trust. Kneehigh, founded in Cornwall in the 1980s, is an example of a company who consciously chooses to work in an isolated location due to its creative benefits, and director Emma Rice credits the remote location with quickly creating “immediate magic,” fostering feelings of acceptance within the company that lead to fearlessness in the creative process.<sup>41</sup> Tucker identifies the Watermill as encouraging a similar type of bonding to that which Rice describes, saying “purely socializing helps with rehearsals. You break down those barriers that might still be there in week two or three because people hadn’t had time to get to know each other.”<sup>42</sup> Tucker’s reference to “barriers” usually present in the early days of rehearsal implicitly characterizes Propeller’s process as more open than other companies’ because of people getting to know each other at an accelerated rate. Tucker did not perform with Propeller until

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<sup>39</sup> “Directions,” The Watermill Theatre, <https://www.watermill.org.uk/directions>, accessed 28 April 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Tony Bell, personal interview, London, 1 April 2014; Bruce-Lockhart, personal interview. Julie Pearson, administrative secretary, confirms that it remains standard practice for the entire rehearsing company to live on-site. Email correspondence, 24 April 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Radosavljević, *The Contemporary Ensemble*, 100-101.

<sup>42</sup> Tucker, personal interview.

1999's *Twelfth Night*, and his statement describes his experiences joining a group of people who had already experienced working together. Similarly, actor Nick Asbury, who joined as a replacement cast member for the 1998 tour of *Henry V*, remembers retiring to the bar on his first day with the cast, which immediately marked him as included in the company's informal community.<sup>43</sup> Because the Watermill's environment was a constant across Propeller's early productions, and the social bonding it encouraged carried over from cast to cast, it allows the Propeller family to expand across multiple productions.

The formation of social bonds in such circumstances impacts the working practices on a production, giving increased opportunity for personal engagement that extends beyond the rehearsal. Looking again at *Kneehigh*, the company's Cornwall location has long been seen as a significant contributing factor to the company's working process, and actress Joanna Holden describes how the environment encourages creative freedom:

You get a lot of work done because the work never stops — by the time you've finished rehearsals, you are having dinner together, and I find, ideas come to people sometimes, not when they are under pressure in the rehearsal room, but quite often it's in the break that you go — “Well, I could try this,” and “What about this?!”<sup>44</sup>

Holden's description of life in Cornwall is one which combines the professional and social world of *Kneehigh*'s performers, establishing a space for creation separate from the “official” one of the rehearsal room. This space allows the work to be integrated into the practitioners' lives. Holden's reference to suggestions being made in rehearsal breaks shows the performers choosing to invest in the work beyond their contracted hours, displaying a personal engagement with the work.

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<sup>43</sup> Nick Asbury, personal interview, Stratford-upon-Avon, 20 September 2013.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted in Radosavljević, *The Contemporary Ensemble*, 110.

Holden's comments are strongly reminiscent of Asbury and Chance's descriptions of working at the Watermill:

Because of the nature of the Watermill, there's nowhere else to go. You could go into Newbury if you wanted to, but it's a taxi ride or a car. There was another show on but, but, once you've seen that, there was nothing else to do. You've been working hard and so you just end up drinking and then we'd just go back to the rehearsal room and start playing piano and guitar.

- Nick Asbury<sup>45</sup>

[The Watermill] is miles away from anywhere and what is there to do at seven o'clock but stop rehearsal for a drink. They'd go for a couple of pints and Edward Hall pipes up with an idea and they'd go, "The rehearsal room is just back there, shall we go do it?" And, of course, now they've got a couple of beers in them, so their creativity is a bit different.

- Joseph Chance<sup>46</sup>

Both actors cite the relative isolation of the Watermill as the reason the theatre's bar become the Propeller's de facto common area, a place to go to let off steam after rehearsal before inevitably drifting back into the rehearsal room just across the lawn. Technology had improved by the late nineties, but the large reliance on mobile phones, laptops, and the internet for entertainment that is so prevalent today had yet to materialize. Actors needed to find other ways to fill the time, and Asbury remembers "jamming in the evening, and at lunchtimes as well, because there wasn't anything else to do," an extension of his account of returning to the rehearsal room to play piano and guitar after a few drinks at the pub.<sup>47</sup> Moments of free "play," periods of time where the actors explored skills or engaged with activities such as musical jam sessions, then found themselves incorporated into the "work" of creating the production.<sup>48</sup> The limited options for amusement at the Watermill created a situation

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<sup>45</sup> Asbury, personal interview.

<sup>46</sup> Chance, personal interview.

<sup>47</sup> Asbury, personal interview.

<sup>48</sup> For more on the development of music in a Propeller performance, see page 229.

where leisure time and work gradually became indistinguishable. The desire to continue to work on the shows came from the actors as the boundaries between rehearsal room, pub, and home all became blurred.

Propeller's original incorporation of work done outside of the rehearsal room has become solidified into its rehearsal process, where contributions from the actors are edited rather than strictly directed by Hall. The process by which these contributions are encouraged and how they result in production beats are explored later in the chapter, but I draw attention to it here because of how this practice is associated with Propeller's beginnings. While the two descriptions of the Watermill's environment quoted above are remarkably similar, there is a striking difference in the vantage point of each actor. As a member of the 1998 *Henry V* touring company, Asbury was present for Propeller's early days and part of the group that participated in these early bonding experiences. Though he had made his Watermill debut in 2006, Chance only joined Propeller in 2012, and so his description is a combination of his own experiences at the theatre, his understanding of Propeller's working processes, and a re-telling of the Propeller-creation story that he has absorbed through his time with the company and his exposure to Propeller's family history. Chance's description helps perpetuate this story, despite his distance from it, and illustrates the extent to which the Watermill's legacy continues to resonate within the company almost two decades later.

The geographical isolation of the Watermill encouraged the formation of social bonds, but it was not the only contributing factor in creating the Propeller family. As remembered by those who were there, the world of *Henry V*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *Twelfth Night* at the Watermill in the late nineties was one of a small group of young men, almost all in their late 20s and early 30s, who had little to do but

“drink and rehearse.”<sup>49</sup> Since Hall had been interested in using music in the production, a number of the actors played an instrument, which provided another opportunity for socialization as described above. The single-sex casting, the demographic similarity of the actors, and their common musical ability immediately provided the company with points of connection. These connections were further strengthened by the company’s participation in a three-day army training camp, a tactic used again by Hall in subsequent productions of *Henry V* (RSC 2000, Propeller 2011). Hall’s goal was to “give them a sense of being blood brothers,” and company manager Jan Dyer felt it resulted in “the most close-knit group of actors I have ever worked with.”<sup>50</sup> The training camp of *Henry V* was used to put the actors in the mind of the squadron of soldiers they would be portraying and, the experiences the company portrayed onstage in *Henry V*— a band of brothers bonded by a long tour of duty, playacting for each other as a way to pass the time — was analogous to the experience of the acting company in creating that story. By further accelerating the bonding period for the company, *Henry V*’s training camp curtailed the awkward getting-to-know you period typical to most productions.<sup>51</sup> These bonds were then maintained through the first-refusal casting policy, described in the following section, so as to preserve the atmosphere of trust in the rehearsal room.

Alongside defining the relationships within the acting company, the Watermill environment had significant impact on defining the relationship between the actors and Edward Hall. Even in collaborative rehearsal environments, the director occupies a position of authority that can limit the extent to which actors feel comfortable

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<sup>49</sup> Asbury, personal interview.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Nicola Russell, “Get Fell In, You ‘Orrible Shower!,” personal collection of Tony Bell.

<sup>51</sup> Kevin Quarmby, *A Twenty-fifth Anniversary Study of Rehearsal and Performance Practice in the 1980 Royal Court Hamlet and the Old Vic Macbeth: An Actor’s View, Shakespeare 1* (2005), 176; Nick Asbury, *Exit Pursued by a Badger* (London: Oberon Books, 2009), 18.

questioning his or her decisions. In Gay McAuley's account of the Sydney Theatre's production of *Toy Symphony*, McAuley praises the collaboration working conditions fostered by director Neil Armfield, but then demonstrates the relationships within the cast to be hierarchical:

Of course, it was only Richard who had the experience and the standing to hold against Neil for any length of time, and the occasions when it happened indicate the kind of give and take that are essential in any genuinely collective project.<sup>52</sup>

"Richard" refers to lead actor Richard Roxburgh, and by quoting his experience and fame as conditions for contribution, McAuley limits the necessary "give and take" to that between director and star. In this example, the "genuinely collective project" is only created by those who have earned a position to contribute. In the early days at the Watermill, there was no such distinction between either the actors or the director. Hall was thirty-one years old during *Henry V*, a similar age to his company and similarly limited in his entertainment and living options, which found him ideally placed to participate in the activities of the acting company.<sup>53</sup> In addition to directing the productions, Hall also lived with the company in Bagnor, toured with it as the acting stage manager, shared hotel rooms with the actors, and participated in their leisure activities, all of which placed Hall as acting within the company rather than overseeing it from a privileged, superior standpoint.<sup>54</sup>

Gradually, Propeller began to expand beyond the confines of the Watermill. Rehearsals for the 2005 *The Winter's Tale* and 2006's *The Taming of the Shrew* were divided between Newbury and London. Since then, Propeller has used Brixton rehearsal studio in London as its base of operation and it ceased to co-produce with

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<sup>52</sup> Gay McAuley, *Not magic but work: An ethnographic account of rehearsal process* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 90-91.

<sup>53</sup> Bonczek and Strock advocate for such participation as it both "natures [members'] trust" and "helps us to see each other in new ways" by humanizing the leader. 58.

<sup>54</sup> Asbury, personal interview; Bruce-Lockhart, personal interview.

the Watermill in 2010. When asked about the change, Tucker describes the move as part of the company's natural evolution:

The shows got too big [...] I think by the time we got to New York in 2005 we had seen these shows really lift off and the tours getting bigger and the Watermill became the parent that waves goodbye to the child going off to university.<sup>55</sup>

Tucker employs family vocabulary, fashioning the Watermill as the parental presence which, having guided and supported its child, encourages its exploration of the greater world.<sup>56</sup> But, as with the parent/child relation, a connection continues to exist between Propeller and the Watermill despite Propeller's recent independence. The company toured to the theatre until 2012, and the Watermill's presence continues to be felt in the creation of Propeller's Jill Fraser Award which recognizes "an outstanding theatre practitioner — in any field — under the age of 30," supporting the Watermill's interest in nurturing young talent.<sup>57</sup> In May 2015, connections between the two were further strengthened when former Propeller associate director Paul Hart was named as incoming artistic director for the theatre.

Propeller's new rehearsal base provides a sharp contrast to its former home in Newbury. Now, instead of small cottages, lazy waterways, and rolling green lawns, the way to the rehearsal rooms is along city streets with parking meters, brick row houses, postage stamp front gardens, power lines, and street lamps. The rooms themselves are two cavernous halls, one 16m x 7.5m the other 7m x 9m, with high ceilings and large windows, marmoleum floors, and walls painted a combination of white and hospital mint green. Old sofas populate the smaller space and, though the building is equipped

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<sup>55</sup> Tucker, personal interview.

<sup>56</sup> This comparison is not unlike Colin Chambers' use of the familial relationships to describe the organization of the RSC as parent to its individual satellite projects. Chambers, *Other places*, 17.

<sup>57</sup> "Lewis Hart wins 2014 Jill Fraser Award," Propeller website, <http://propeller.org.uk/news/lewis-hart-wins-2014-jill-fraser-award>, accessed 8 December 2014.

with a small kitchen, its website promises “restaurants, cafes and bars nearby” to which actors can escape.<sup>58</sup> As a hired building in a city space, it is available to the company from 9am to 6pm, and so the freedom to come and go, to try out ideas hatched over a pint or stay late to fiddle with a bit of movement is hampered. Without the isolation and the enforced prolonged contact of the “Watermill boiler house,” the sense of investment becomes somewhat dissipated.<sup>59</sup> Socializing is confined to drinks after work or the afternoon lunch break, which makes a harder distinction between actors’ work and leisure times. As Tucker describes it: “The Watermill just focuses everything into the plays that you're putting on. People aren’t arriving in the morning late because they’ve been stuck on the tube and you don’t have the distraction of the outside world.”<sup>60</sup> Now, people are able to leave at the end of the day and return to their homes, partners, children, and friends who have no connection with the world of the rehearsal room, compartmentalizing “Propeller” as separate from their everyday lives. In Newbury, the two were indistinguishable.<sup>61</sup>

While the migration to England’s capital city seems potentially detrimental to the company’s working practices as it lessens the controlled focus on the work found at the Watermill, it paradoxically has aided in preserving the original company spirit though its ability to retain actors from one production to the next. According to actor Chris Myles, the change in rehearsal location is advantageous to the company because proximity to London eases the tension between professional and familial obligations, which makes it easier for actors to commit to Propeller’s lengthy contracts. The move therefore preserves the company’s ability to retain relationships with that original

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<sup>58</sup> Descriptions and measurements taken from “Hiring rehearsal space,” Brixton Community Base, <http://www.brixtoncommunitybase.org/hiring-rehearsal-space/>, accessed 7 July 2015.

<sup>59</sup> Chris Myles, personal interview, London, 11 November 2013.

<sup>60</sup> Tucker, personal interview.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.



group of actors.<sup>62</sup> Bruce-Lockhart credits maintenance of this core group of actors with instilling in new members the same spirit of camaraderie experienced at the Watermill.<sup>63</sup> New actors are then able to experience a similar environment to that of the Watermill first-hand when a degree of the enforced socializing is replicated in the company's rigorous touring schedule.<sup>64</sup>

Having internalized the atmosphere and attitude of the Watermill, the acting company carries the lessons of the Watermill forward through subsequent tours and provides an example of "Propeller" behavior for actors joining the company. Propeller's unique first-refusal casting policy has been paramount in preserving some of the original feeling engendered by the Watermill even as the company has moved on to bigger venues in more urban working environments.

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### The First Refusal Casting Policy

Propeller is described by Edward Hall as an "accidental theatre company."<sup>65</sup> In 1998, the British Council provided funding for *Henry V* to tour, with the stipulation a second production was added.<sup>66</sup> Hall wished to reunite the *Henry V* cast, so when the production was remounted, the same actors (save for three replacements) returned to perform *Henry V* in repertory alongside *The Comedy of Errors*.<sup>67</sup> Hall's decision was both pragmatic and personal. Because financial constraints dictated one company of actors would be used to perform both shows, there would have been a practical imperative to

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<sup>62</sup> Myles, personal interview.

<sup>63</sup> Bruce-Lockhart, personal interview.

<sup>64</sup> Tucker, personal interview.

<sup>65</sup> "Edward Hall on Propeller's *Henry V* and *The Winter's Tale*," WhatsOnStage, 8 January 2015, [http://www.whatsonstage.com/bath-theatre/news/01-2012/edward-hall-on-propellers-henry-v-and-the-winters-\\_5789.html](http://www.whatsonstage.com/bath-theatre/news/01-2012/edward-hall-on-propellers-henry-v-and-the-winters-_5789.html), accessed 20 April 2013.

<sup>66</sup> Caro McKay, email correspondence, 10 July 2015.

<sup>67</sup> Jamie Glover, James Tucker, Robert Horwell, and David Birrell did not return. Roles within the productions were recast and Richard Clothier, Nicholas Asbury, Jonathan McGuinness, and Dugald Bruce-Lockhart joined the company. Full cast lists can be found in Appendix A.

maintaining *Henry*'s original cast so as to focus on staging the new production. The personal imperative came from Hall's investment in the relationships he had developed with the actors and his desire that they, in turn, feel an investment in the work that they created with the company. Hall toured with the productions and began conversations on the road with the actors about reuniting for a third project.<sup>68</sup> In 1999, *Twelfth Night* opened at the Watermill with eight returning actors from the previous tour. Over two years, a total of sixteen actors had performed three productions, and it was during *Twelfth Night* that the decision was made to establish Propeller as an official company.<sup>69</sup> Since then, Hall's continued commitment to honoring the work of Propeller's actors has solidified into a first-refusal casting policy with a three-tiered offer system: actors from the most recent tour are prioritized, followed by actors from previous Propeller tours, and, finally, actors who successfully audition for the company.

As Propeller has evolved, the first-refusal casting policy, combined with the company's adherence to an equal pay rate for everyone involved in a production, has been instrumental in retaining the ensemble atmosphere first provided by the conditions at the Watermill. The importance of the policy is evident in the frequency with which it is cited by Propeller actors when discussing the company as an ensemble and it allows the company to satisfy what John Britton calls the

twin imperatives in an ensemble's development — the need for continual renewal and the need to deepen shared understandings. Both are necessary to promote the quality and longevity of the ensemble's work. Perhaps [...] part of the skill of finding the balance between

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<sup>68</sup> Asbury, personal interview.

<sup>69</sup> "Edward Hall on Propeller's *Henry V* and *The Winter's Tale*." Of the eleven actors who comprised the *Henry V*/*The Comedy of Errors* company, only three (Dugald Bruce-Lockhart, Nick Asbury and Alexis Daniel) chose not to return for *Twelfth Night*. Asbury rejoined the company for the 2011/2 tour and Bruce-Lockhart has since performed in seven Propeller tours and was named as an Associate Director in 2012. Vince Leigh and James Tucker were added to the company to fill the vacancies.

continuity and change comes in also finding a balance between individuality and a submission to the needs of the collective.<sup>70</sup>

Striking such a balance is a difficult task. For actors either just starting out, trying to support a family, or nearing retirement, the artistic benefits of joining an ensemble company may not seem to outweigh the potential financial sacrifices. A famous example that demonstrates the difficulties in establishing a long-term company is Peter Hall's contractual attempt to form an ensemble at the Royal Shakespeare Company in the 1960s. Hugh Jenkins of Equity praised the introduction of "the long-term element into the employment of actors" that gave stability "without seriously inhibiting their freedom," and an editorial in *The Stage* hailed the scheme as "a dream come true. Never before in this country has an actor been able to work under such ideal conditions."<sup>71</sup> However, the contracts "were expensive, difficult to administer and inflexible — they did not allow sufficiently for the swift changes of heart and fortune that characterize the theatre."<sup>72</sup> Less than a year after signing one of the inaugural long-term contracts, RSC actor Peter O'Toole left the company to film "Lawrence of Arabia."<sup>73</sup> Since then, the RSC has tried a number of different approaches to creating an ensemble, most notably through the employment of ensemble contracts based around a specific project such as *The Wars of the Roses* (1963), *The Plantagenets* (1988),

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<sup>70</sup> Bell, personal interview; Caroline Taylor, "Play's leading lady is a man!," *This is Lancashire*, 16 April 2007 [http://www.thisislancashire.co.uk/news/1331628.plays\\_leading\\_lady\\_is\\_a\\_man/](http://www.thisislancashire.co.uk/news/1331628.plays_leading_lady_is_a_man/), accessed 20 June 2015; "Bard propelled in new directions," *Sheffield Telegraph*, 13 January 2011, [www.sheffieldtelegraph.co.uk/what-s-on/theatre/bard-propelled-in-new-directions-1-2924012](http://www.sheffieldtelegraph.co.uk/what-s-on/theatre/bard-propelled-in-new-directions-1-2924012), accessed 20 June 2015; David Dunn, "Single-sex Shakespeare isn't all about spin," *The Star*, 26 January 2012, [www.thestar.co.uk/what-s-on/out-about/single-sex-propeller-isn-t-all-about-spin-1-4180228](http://www.thestar.co.uk/what-s-on/out-about/single-sex-propeller-isn-t-all-about-spin-1-4180228), accessed 20 June 2015. Britton, 299.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in "Stratford Claim on Actors," *The Times*, 17 October 1960, 8; John Goodwin, ed., *The Royal Shakespeare Theatre Company 1960-1963* (London: Max Reinhardt, 1964), 177.

<sup>72</sup> Sally Beauman, *The Royal Shakespeare Company: A History in Ten Decades* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 240.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

and *The Histories* (2006-8).<sup>74</sup> The RSC's struggles with creating an ensemble provide insight into the obstacles inherent in establishing an ensemble theatre company in England.

Instead of a contractual model, Propeller's organizational structure has developed as a version of what Alex Mermikides terms the "core and pool" system, in which a core production team, headed by the director, remains consistent and continuously draws from a pool of performers according to the perceived needs of the production.<sup>75</sup> Mermikides views this system as one answer to the needs of the individual in commercial theatre as it does not limit actors' opportunities by permanently binding them to one company but is still able to form a "sense of ensemble" around a stable director.<sup>76</sup> The problem with this model is that it creates a distinction between the "permanent" core and the "disposable" pool. Mermikides explains that

[e]ven for performers who have a long-term relationship with a particular director or company, the model essentially renders the performer economically and professionally dependent on the company core, a dynamic that might be difficult to override however egalitarian the rehearsal-room dynamics of any individual project.<sup>77</sup>

Propeller's first-refusal casting policy evolves this model through its three-tiered offer structure, which changes the power dynamic between the director and the company and makes the two interdependent. In Propeller, casting begins with the actors currently in the company, who then decide whether or not to continue their

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid. These were some of the concerns which Noble had hoped to address through Project Fleet. Stanley Wells defended Noble's policies as "The company has had problems in recruiting actors of the right calibre. Resistance by the actors and their agents stems from a number of factors. Regrettably, RSC actors' salaries do not compete with those offered in the West End, in television, and in film. Leading actors may not wish to be away from the West End for too long. Accommodation in Stratford tends to be expensive. Family responsibilities may act as a deterrent." "Awakening Your Faith," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2002), 526.

<sup>75</sup> Alex Mermikides, "Collective Creation and the 'Creative Industries': The British Context," in *Collective Creation in Contemporary Performance*, eds. Kathryn Mederos Syssoyeva and Scott Proudfit (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013), 57-58.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

relationship with the company. This system gives initial power to the pool, members of which consequently expand the core if they choose to return to the company. After these decisions are made, Hall draws from the pool in a more conventional version of Mermikides' model. New actors are finally cast to fill remaining roles without creating a sense they are taking work from other company members, while those actors who choose not to return are free to pursue new projects. The dependence Mermikides warns against becomes shared between the core and pool, as it is as important for actors to choose to come back and maintain company continuity as it is for Hall to find roles for them in a production.

In light of this, the first refusal casting policy is not contractual but rather a kind of gentlemen's agreement between Hall, the individual actor, and the company as a whole, which introduces an element of personal honor to the two sides of the casting arrangement.<sup>78</sup> The understanding is that the company honors its commitment to the actors of a particular production in exchange for the actor adhering to company-dictated standards of behavior, placing the impetus for involvement on the individual's attitude and engagement rather than on achievement or perceived talent. As described by the actors, Propeller's policy means that "you sack yourself" so it creates the company's organization according to a self-selecting system.<sup>79</sup> This attitude is grounded in a "work of each for wheel [*sic*] of all" ethos.<sup>80</sup> "Their focus has to be outward-looking," Hall explains, "If people do that, everything functions. If they don't, if there's a sniff of self-interest, people leave very rapidly."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Bell, personal interview.

<sup>79</sup> "Propeller's The Taming Of The Shrew and Twelfth Night at Plymouth Theatre Royal," *Plymouth Herald*, 8 February 2013, <http://www.plymouthherald.co.uk/Propeller-s-Taming-Shrew-Twelfth-Night-Plymouth/story-18087907-detail/story.html>, accessed 20 June 2015; Chris Myles, "Watermill Thoughts," Watermill Theatre, <https://www.watermill.org.uk/blog/index.php/propellers-chris-myles-blogs-on-his-time-at-the-watermill/>, accessed 7 July 2015; Emily Bearn, "Ed and the Gang," *London Evening Standard*, 15 December 2006, 49.

<sup>80</sup> Alice Jones, "A new spin on Shakespeare," *The Independent*, 26 January 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/a-new-spin-on-shakespeare-2194278.html>, accessed 4 January 2015. "Work of each for weal of all" is the Bedales school motto.

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in Jones.

Hall describes an environment where the actor has to be willing to put his own needs aside for that of the group, an attitude that Bonczek and Storck identify as not only essential to promoting a healthy ensemble, but also as stemming from a personal investment in the work being done.<sup>82</sup> This attitude is vital to Propeller's rehearsal process, discussed later in this chapter, which is predicated on experimentation. Actors are constantly expected to contribute ideas throughout the rehearsal process and even throughout a production's run, as it is anticipated audience reactions will require adjustments to their performances. This approach results in an incredibly demanding working model, and some actors may struggle with the amount of freedom they are granted and/or the level of active contribution required of them. Those who believe in the work, and who are able to meet the strenuous demands of the fluid rehearsal process, return to the company and contribute to Propeller's working environment. Conversely, those who are not comfortable with Propeller's rehearsal methods are given the opportunity to leave the company without severing professional ties or breaching their contractual obligations.<sup>83</sup>

There is therefore a cyclical relationship between the first-refusal casting policy and the sense of investment it encourages. One of Hall's primary aims in turning those original, individual productions to the foundation for a fully-formed company was to create a company where participants would feel a sense of ownership in the work being done. Reflecting on Propeller's origins, Hall said:

To me, success should breed opportunity – not just opportunity for me, but for all of us involved in the work we do. This approach means the company is led by the actors and it has an independence not so easily enjoyed by other companies with more hierarchical management

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<sup>82</sup> Bonczek and Storck, 14.

<sup>83</sup> Bell, personal interview.

structures. It has also engendered enormous care and responsibility for the work we have done by all those who have created it.<sup>84</sup>

Hall recognizes the importance of the acting company in creating Propeller's work, making a company that is "led by the actors." Ownership is hard to define, but company manager Nick Chesterfield feels it largely stems from the first-refusal casting policy. Chesterfield says: "They have a stake in the company in a way that most actors don't. That helps in all sorts of ways. It means that the company belongs to them; they invest in it."<sup>85</sup> The fact that the unofficial first-refusal casting policy is paired with tour-by-tour contracts means actors must actively choose to recommit themselves to a project rather than being carried along by a sense of inertia. Asbury feels that the choice leads to an "unspoken unity" amongst the company because they recognize in one another that they have chosen to be a part of Propeller.<sup>86</sup>

While it has transpired that actors have chosen to leave, Propeller actors are generally enthusiastic about the company and its collaborative environment.<sup>87</sup> Though only a snapshot of Propeller's casting history, cast list for Propeller's two productions of *The Winter's Tale* (Figure 11) begins to show how Propeller remakes itself over time, yet still has strong connections to the Watermill productions around which the company was formed. Six actors from the 2005 cast and five from the 2012 cast performed in at least one of Propeller's Watermill productions in the late 1990s, providing a level of continuity throughout Propeller's production history.<sup>88</sup> Such longevity and continuity is often quoted as a central component of ensemble practice.

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<sup>84</sup> Edward Hall, "Propeller brings wind of change to theatre," *The Yorkshire Post*, 7 January 2011 <http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/propeller-brings-wind-of-change-to-theatre-1-3030689>, accessed 20 June 2015.

<sup>85</sup> Quoted in Will Wollen, "Interview with Nick Chesterfield - company manager," *Henry V* education pack (Propeller: 2011), 18.

<sup>86</sup> Asbury, personal interview.

<sup>87</sup> Myles, personal interview; Bruce-Lockhart, personal interview; Trenchard, personal interview; Tucker, personal interview; Chance, personal interview.

<sup>88</sup> For a complete picture of the effects of the first-refusal casting policy over time, see Appendix B.

**Fig. 11: The Casts of Propeller's *The Winter's Tale*, 2005 and 2012**

*Italics indicate an actor's Propeller debut. Bold indicates the actor did not return as of 2014. Asterisks identify actors who performed with Propeller at the Watermill in the late 1990s.*

<b><u>Characters</u></b>	<b><u>2005</u></b>	<b><u>2012</u></b>
<b>Polixenes</b>	Vince Leigh*	Nick Asbury*
<b>Leontes</b>	Richard Clothier*	Robert Hands
<b>Hermione/Dorcas</b>	Simon Scardifield	Richard Dempsey
<b>Mamillius/Perdita/Time</b>	<i>Tam Williams</i>	<i>Ben Allen</i>
<b>Camillo</b>	<i>Bob Barrett</i>	Chris Myles*
<b>Antigonus</b>	Dugald Bruce-Lockhart*	Dugald Bruce-Lockhart*
<b>1st Lord</b>	Jules Werner	<b><i>Dominic Thorburn</i></b>
<b>Officer/Autolycus</b>	Tony Bell*	Tony Bell*
<b>Emilia</b>	James Tucker*	<b><i>Gunnar Cauthery</i></b>
<b>1st Lady</b>	Alasdair Craig	<i>Gary Shelford</i>
<b>Paulina</b>	<b><i>Adam Levy</i></b>	Vince Leigh*
<b>Cleomenes</b>	Alasdair Craig	<b><i>Dominic Thorburn</i></b>
<b>Dion</b>	Chris Myles*	John Dougall
<b>Mariner</b>	Alasdair Craig	<i>Finn Hanlon</i>
<b>Old Shepherd</b>	Chris Myles*	John Dougall
<b>Young Shepherd</b>	James Tucker*	<i>Karl Davies</i>
<b>Florizel</b>	Dugald Bruce-Lockhart*	<i>Finn Hanlon</i>
<b>Mopsa</b>	Jules Werner	<b><i>Gunnar Cauthery</i></b>

In 2004, the Ensemble Theatre Conference published materials which defined “ensemble” as “occur[ring] when a group of theatre artists (performers, artistic directors, stage management and the key administrative staff) work together over many years to create theatre,” thus emphasizing continuity of personnel.<sup>89</sup> Robert Cohen defines ensemble as a “long-term relationship: a day-in, day-out collaboration in share living, thinking, and creating.”<sup>90</sup> John Collins defines groups such as the

<sup>89</sup> “Ensemble Theatre Conference,” Directors Guild of Great Britain, 23 November 2004, <http://www.dggb.org/files/EnsembleTheatreConf.pdf>, accessed 15 May 2015.

<sup>90</sup> Cohen, 16-17.



Wooster Group and Elevator Repair Service as ensembles primarily because they consist of “the same artists returning to collaborate on a new project.”<sup>91</sup> The acting company for each Propeller tour is approximately 1:2, new to returning members, creating stability in the company’s identity even as its roster continuously renews.<sup>92</sup> Of the sixty actors listed on Propeller’s website as having worked with the company, nearly a third have performed in at least three full-length Propeller productions. This percentage jumps to one half if it also includes Propeller’s educational “Pocket” productions — hour-long versions of the full-length productions which are produced for children and then tour for a limited time around England.<sup>93</sup> The attractiveness of stable employment, combined with the popularity of Propeller’s working style with its actors, is reflected in the company’s rate of retention.

The flexibility afforded by the first-refusal casting policy is vital to maintaining the creative health of Propeller as a company as well as the physical and mental health of its members.<sup>94</sup> By establishing a system that allows actors to pursue other projects, the policy ensure there is space for new members to continuously join and refresh the company. Propeller’s highly physical performance style was developed by a company of young men, but that original acting company is older now than it was in 1997. The average age of actors in 1997’s *Henry V* was approximately thirty, while the average age of the company in 2005 was thirty-five.<sup>95</sup> As the company continues, the energy and youthful style that once defined Propeller becomes harder to sustain without opening the company up to younger members and fresh

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<sup>91</sup> John Collins, “Elevator Repair Service and The Wooster Group: Ensembles surviving themselves,” in *Encountering Ensemble*, ed. John Britton (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 235.

<sup>92</sup> Notable exceptions are the 2008/9 *The Merchant of Venice/A Midsummer Night’s Dream* tour (10:5) and the 2010/1 *Richard III/The Comedy of Errors Tour* (1:13).

<sup>93</sup> 19 of the 60 actors have performed in at least three full-length productions, 29 of 60 have performed in at least three full-length or Pocket productions. See: Appendix B.

<sup>94</sup> Practitioners Gabor Tompa, Emma Rice, and Dan Rothenberg all warning against permanent contracts which can lead to company members becoming complacent or, in intense working conditions, over-extended. Radosavljević, *The Contemporary Ensemble*, 44, 99, 127.

<sup>95</sup> Asbury, personal interview; Bearn, 50.

perspectives. Actor Tony Bell has observed Propeller addressing this need, as “the company keeps evolving with more youth as the old guys leave and have families and become tired and the youth steps in. You have to have high energy, it’s very physical.”<sup>96</sup> The casting patterns across Propeller’s history support this view. Continuing to use *The Winter’s Tale* casts as a case study, all the new members across the two *The Winter’s Tale* casts were in their 20s or early 30s when they joined the company (with the exception of Bob Barrett), and both Ben Allen and Dominic Thorburn had only recently graduated drama school. With each production, the company remakes itself — new members refresh the company through exposing it to new experiences and training, balancing the actors who bring with them a shared history and knowledge.<sup>97</sup> Because of this balance within the company, Propeller is able to evolve while still maintaining its status as an ensemble through the enduring quality of its aims, methods, and attitudes towards the work.

For these incoming actors to have a place in Propeller, other actors must choose not to return, and there are a number of reasons an actor might choose to opt-out of continuing with the company that are independent of the personal feelings towards the work as described above. For example, Propeller’s extensive touring schedule can take a physical toll on its actors. Though the Watermill originally produced Propeller’s productions and operated as the company’s home base, Propeller has always toured, visiting theatres from Milton Keynes to Hong Kong. As Propeller’s

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<sup>96</sup> Bell, personal interview.

<sup>97</sup> Bruce-Lockhart, personal interview.

original acting company ages and gains familial responsibilities, the appeal of long months of international touring wanes, decreasing the number of actors willing to commit to back-to-back seasons. The 2011/2 tour for *Henry V* and *The Winter's Tale* is indicative of the kind of schedule Propeller actors can expect: a commitment to the company from October 2011 to July 2012 with twenty-one individual tour stops beginning in November, including a week each in Spain, New Zealand and Germany and two weeks each in Australia and China. Furthermore, Propeller's rate of production accelerated between 2010 and 2013, eradicating the recovery time between tours.

Extensive touring also keeps Propeller actors away from London, which impacts an actor's ability to be seen by casting agents and considered for other projects. Tucker observes that the first-refusal casting policy is "a very positive idea but it isn't always possible to offer actors clear career progression."<sup>98</sup> Interviewed during his time performing with the 2013/4 tour, Tucker reflected on the ways in which the accelerated tour rate could impact an actor's decision to return:

In the early days, there were bigger gaps, so people had the taste of working elsewhere — or the taste of unemployment — and they'd be happy to come back. It is a shortened period now, between finishing and starting, and maybe people need a wider gap in their heads. Agents can be difficult about it. Everyone wants you to be working in London, or available to go for interviews, so I think I might encounter a problem at the end of this contract of signing up for another one immediately.<sup>99</sup>

Tucker refers to "the taste of working elsewhere," drawing attention to the impact remaining with one company can have on an actor's individual work. Though new members ensure continuous exposure to methods and approaches beyond those found in the Propeller rehearsal room, actors may wish to experience new ways of working

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<sup>98</sup> Tucker, personal interview.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

for themselves, or may have personal interests they wish to pursue. Opportunities for non-Propeller work are valuable because they offset what actor Simon Scardifield refers to as the “potentially tragic” personal consequences of working with the same group of people consistently, despite the benefits for the overall production.<sup>100</sup>

Scardifield was referring to the social prospects of the company, for many years isolated in Newbury, but acknowledged that the shared language and comfort with Propeller can make it difficult for an actor to adjust to working with new people.<sup>101</sup> Touring, commercial exposure, and personal growth are all factors that potentially limit who of the original company can afford to remain, be it for physical, professional, or personal reasons.<sup>102</sup>

Actor Nick Asbury’s relationship with Propeller serves as an example of how increased flexibility in contractual relationships adequately responds to the practicalities of an actor’s profession as well as provides a reliable home. After touring with the company throughout 1998 as Robert Horwell’s replacement in *Henry V*, Asbury chose to concentrate on a music career rather than return for 1999’s *Twelfth Night*, allowing him to pursue an area that interested him.<sup>103</sup> In 2001 he was cast in Michael Boyd’s *Henry VI* productions for the RSC, which precluded his participating in *Rose Rage*, and the practical need for immediate work necessitated Asbury accepting a part in Hall’s West End production of *Macbeth* in 2003 rather than re-joining Propeller for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.<sup>104</sup> Though not an active part of the company, Asbury continued to collaborate with members of the Propeller family by forming his

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<sup>100</sup> Caroline Taylor, “Play’s leading lady is a man!,” *This is Lancashire*, 16 April 2007 [http://www.thisislancashire.co.uk/news/1331628.plays\\_leading\\_lady\\_is\\_a\\_man/](http://www.thisislancashire.co.uk/news/1331628.plays_leading_lady_is_a_man/), accessed 20 June 2015.

<sup>101</sup> Simon Scardifield, workshop for MA: Shakespeare and Creativity, The Shakespeare Institute, 2 November 2014.

<sup>102</sup> For comparison, Emma Rice discusses the necessity of contract flexibility for Kneehigh in Radosavljević, *The Contemporary Ensemble*, 99-100.

<sup>103</sup> Horwell chose not to return to the tour, as he had a newborn baby at home. Asbury, personal interview.

<sup>104</sup> All personal history from this paragraph is from Asbury, personal interview.

band with fellow Propeller actor Dugald Bruce-Lockhart and working with Hall on *Macbeth* — the former instance responding to Asbury’s artistic interests while the latter satisfied his practical financial needs. Asbury then returned to the RSC for the *Histories* from 2006 until 2009. It was not until 2011 that Asbury was able to re-join Propeller for the tour of *Henry V* and *The Winter’s Tale*, thirteen years after he had first performed with the company.

Asbury’s return to Propeller marks the crucial difference in Propeller’s application of the core and pool model in comparison with larger companies and individual directors. While Asbury’s collaborations with Boyd at the RSC formed a connection that characterized Asbury as part of Boyd’s “pool” and resulted in Boyd bringing him back for the *Histories*, Asbury remained dependent on Boyd and the RSC for employment once that production closed. Asbury’s return to Propeller was prompted by the actor himself, who independently contacted Hall to express his interest in rejoining the company. Though Asbury was not guaranteed a role with Propeller, he was in a position to put himself forward for consideration, and, having been successful, he was once again able to determine his future with the company. Asbury’s trajectory is not unusual — the same tour that saw his return also welcomed back Vince Leigh, who had been absent from the company for twelve years, and James Tucker, David Acton, Robert Hands, and Alaisdair Craig have all taken absences from the company for more than five years before returning. These instances demonstrate that actors maintain a relationship with the company regardless of their official affiliation.

For those actors that do stay, they enjoy the extraordinary stability the first-refusal casting policy provides, which perpetuates the view of the company as a “family” center. Having confidence in one’s employment eradicates what Steve Gooch

refers to as “Next Job Syndrome” — a continuous anxiety about future employment that causes actors to be perpetually thinking about their next career step rather than focusing their energies on the present task.<sup>105</sup> Writing about his experience as part of the RSC’s long Histories ensemble, Asbury confirms the effect of “Next Job Syndrome” on an actor’s work:

One of the least talked-about notions of ensemble, in all the discussions the RSC and others are having, is the simple one that an actor surely does better when he doesn’t have the threat of penury hanging, scythe-like, above his or her head. They can’t relax and start to give a true account of their work and talent.<sup>106</sup>

Both Gooch’s and Asbury’s assessments identify a detrimental effect of insecure employment as its ability to distract a performer from his current work, making a direct connection between the business of theatre and its artistic potential. The assumption is that actors desire stable employment to make a better account of their work.

This level of stability also diminishes the prospect of “assessment through rehearsal” by which actors feel compelled to prove themselves beyond the audition process to secure potential future work with the director. As Trenchard describes it:

When you’ve worked with most of the people before, not only do you have a working language at the beginning of the rehearsal period that makes it go quicker, but you have a kind of confidence in yourself that you don’t need to prove yourself when you’re acting a new character in the same way that you do when in you’re starting a play in a new environment. [...] You don’t have to worry quite so much, which enables you to make bolder choices. You’re not thinking about your own insecurities, you’re just thinking about the character.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Steve Gooch, *All Together Now: An Alternative View of Theatre and the Community* (London: Methuen, 1984), 22.

<sup>106</sup> Asbury, *Exit Pursued by a Badger*, 54. See also: Sue Jameson, “The contemporary English actor: a personal survey of attitudes at the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre Company,” in *Drama and the Actor*, ed. James Redmond, vol. 6 of *Themes in Drama*, ed. James Redmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 212.

<sup>107</sup> Trenchard, personal interview.

Just as Asbury connects the stability of the first-refusal casting policy to benefitting an actor's work by freeing him from distractions regarding employment, Trenchard sees the familiarity engendered by the policy as lessening insecurities and self-consciousness when it comes to developing a performance in rehearsal. In fact, these two aspects of the policy are intrinsically linked: Knowing they will not be penalized for their contributions, the actors are given more freedom to take risks and experiment during the creative process without fear of judgment.<sup>108</sup>

This level of trust returns to the benefits afforded by working with a consistent group over a prolonged period of time. Compare a description of the National

Theatre by actress Isabelle Huppert to Simon Scardifield's description of Propeller:

Seven hundred people work here. It's huge. There are three auditoriums, long corridors, magnetic cards to get you from one place to another. One is completely anonymous, which doesn't bother me but...I feel rather alone. I have lunch in the canteen where three hundred people I don't know line up.

- Huppert<sup>109</sup>

I'm acting with people who I've spent most of the last seven years with, which in personal terms is potentially tragic, but the work really benefits. We're all in the rehearsal room all the time, pitching in ideas, and on stage there is a level of trust and, well, fun that I don't think you could find in any other company.

- Scardifield<sup>110</sup>

In describing the environment created by Propeller's continuity, Scardifield credits the time that the actors have spent together with their ability to produce superior work.

Such a view supports the idea expressed by many practitioners that continued association between actors and directors fosters cooperative collaboration.<sup>111</sup> Asbury

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<sup>108</sup> Scardifield, workshop for MA: Shakespeare in Creativity.

<sup>109</sup> Quoted in Lyn Haill, ed., *In Rehearsal at the National: Rehearsal Photographs 1976-2001* (London: Oberon Books, 2001), 159.

<sup>110</sup> C. Taylor.

<sup>111</sup> Jameson, 212; McAuley, 224; Radosavljević, *The Contemporary Ensemble*, 112.

and Trenchard both referred to a “shared language” amongst returning members, and Trenchard and Myles both estimate that having previously worked with cast members increases the efficiency of the rehearsal process.<sup>112</sup>

The first-refusal casting policy balances the needs of the individual actors with the needs of the ensemble, ensuring both continuity and flexibility. From an organizational standpoint, the first-refusal casting policy retains actors within the company who share a common, collaborative attitude and who maintain a level of personal investment in their artistic “family.” The policy dictates which actors are brought together to form each tour’s acting company, and also determines individual casting within the company. The level of continuity achieved by the policy subsequently affects how the company produces Shakespeare’s plays, as actors and audiences alike are able to draw on a shared history to continuously create meaning in performance.

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## **Casting**

The Watermill and the first-refusal casting policy are responsible for forming the Propeller family, but that family is only made visible to audiences through its presence in performance. An examination of Propeller’s casting approach demonstrates how the actors who form the company are assigned roles to create meaning within and across productions, marking the intersection between the practical considerations of creating a company and that company’s resulting artistic potential. This potential is closely connected to the view of an actors’ role as part of an interconnected whole, whether it be through doubling or tripling within a

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<sup>112</sup> Asbury, personal interview; Trenchard, personal interview; Myles, personal interview.



production or cross-casting across repertory productions. Furthermore, the continuity of the first-refusal casting policy offers a third casting category for consideration in the casting throughout an actor's association with Propeller. Though every actor is assumed to be available to perform a choric function within a production, even if he does not eventually fulfill that role in performance, I have chosen to focus on named characters. Since these characters' identities are clearly delineated, they communicate meaning which can be more clearly compared than those of the choric characters.<sup>113</sup>

The structure of the first-refusal casting policy marks the most notable feature of Propeller's casting process as it requires Edward Hall to choose plays and cast productions according to the known talents of his actors. This process is an unusual reversal of conventional casting practices where the actors are chosen to fulfill the needs of the play. In other ways the process by which roles are cast corresponds with common theatrical practice, as Hall seeks to find the correct match between physicality and personality between actor and character, as well as consider how each actor will contribute to creating a cohesive community onstage.<sup>114</sup> Matching the physicality and personality of an actor to character is a fundamental part of any casting process and results in certain actors becoming associated with certain types of roles. The only actor to enjoy an unbroken relationship with Propeller, Chris Myles has performed twenty-four named characters in eighteen full-length productions, half of which can be functionally categorized as female servant (Alice, Maria, Nerissa), royal councilor (Buckingham, Exeter, Camillo), or father (Old Clifford, Egeus, Old Shepherd, Vincentio, Baptista, Aegeon).<sup>115</sup> The frequency with which Myles' roles fall

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<sup>113</sup> This does not mean that every actor will appear as a choric character within a production, but instances where an actor is entirely excluded from the choric presence are rare, such as Dugald Bruce-Lockhart as King Henry V (2011) or Richard Clothier as Richard III (2010).

<sup>114</sup> Suzy Catliff and Jennifer Granville, *The Casting Handbook for Film and Theatre Makers* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 115; "Edward Hall on Propeller's *Henry V* and *The Winter's Tale*."

<sup>115</sup> For a complete list of roles, see Appendix A.

into the functional categories illustrates the patterns that emerge through the practice of matching the performer to the role, but that does not mean that Propeller actors are strictly type-cast. While there are certain roles that Myles is cast in repeatedly, the patterns only account for half of his performances. The roles not listed include the young Prince Edward in *Rose Rage* (2002) and the elderly suitor Gremio in *The Taming of the Shrew* (2007), both of which fall outside the type of role usually given to Myles and span a large range in age. Myles' performance history demonstrates an actor being cast along parallel tracks: the first acknowledges his skill in portraying certain types of parts while the second is comprised of roles which go against type, allowing him to expand his range.

This tension between type-casting an actor and providing new performance opportunities is not unique to Propeller. What is less common is the extent to which Propeller actors are able to determine their own participation in each project, either through direct negotiations or through their established relationship with the company. Though Hall has final control over casting decisions, actors are encouraged to "put their hats into the ring" for parts they especially want to play.<sup>116</sup> Propeller's commercial success has been predicated on its work as a company so there is not the same desire to cast a high-profile actor in a lead role as can be found in the commercial sector.<sup>117</sup> Without this correlation between celebrity status and leading roles, Propeller actors can bid for roles knowing that they will be fairly considered based on their talent and their history within the company. According to Myles, the view within the company is that "if you are good enough to be in Propeller, you're

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<sup>116</sup> Bruce-Lockhart, personal interview; Alex Ramon, "Propeller-spinning: An Interview with Chris Myles," 17 February 2011, <http://boycottingtrends.blogspot.co.uk/2012/02/propeller-spinning-interview-with-chris.html>, accessed 25 April 2013.

<sup>117</sup> Nor is the need for known actors confined to commercial theatre. Hannah Miller, head of casting for the RSC speaks of the desire to "get high profile people," and the NT has hosted a number of celebrities in recent productions including Adrian Lester in *Othello* (2013) and the Donmar Warehouse featured Tom Hiddleston in *Coriolanus* (2014). Miller quoted in Catliff and Granville, 115.

good enough to play any of the roles.”<sup>118</sup> Instead, Bruce-Lockhart cites an actor’s relationship to the company as one of the defining factors in assigning him a role, as “People will get cast according to their experience, how long they’ve been there, is it their turn to have a good crack of the whip.”<sup>119</sup> Bruce-Lockhart’s reference to an actor’s “turn” gestures towards a system that rewards an actor’s investment in the company while still balancing the needs of the individual with those of the group.

Myles’ performance as Camillo in 2012’s *The Winter’s Tale* is an example of these needs being addressed within a production. Having previously performed in the 2005 production as Dion and Old Shepherd, the strategizing courtier was a strong departure from the comic clown role. It also provided a new relationship between Myles and the production as a whole, giving him a single role over the course of the production rather than doubling roles across the play’s Sicilian and Bohemian halves. As Camillo, Myles’ performance presented Camillo as a man who was more intellectual than physical, a courtier who took his time to process both Leontes’ jealousy of Hermione and Polixenes’ rage at Florizel before carefully strategizing responses to each, while at the same time adopting an informal manner and an easy tone with the kings when he thought them in good humor. This resulted in a Camillo who was craftier than had been characterized by Myles’ predecessor, Bob Barrett, but whose personality seemed at home in the sleek, political Sicilian court embodied in Michael Pavelka’s updated scenic designs. Myles’ performance as Camillo is an example of how the needs of an individual actor were aligned with those of the production.

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<sup>118</sup> Propeller Video, “Interview with Chris Myles,” YouTube.com, 6 February 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJyXJLHHxQk>, accessed 25 June 2015.

<sup>119</sup> Bruce-Lockhart, personal interview.

By necessity, members returning for a consecutive tour are given the greatest opportunity to impact their casting, as it is only after they have made their decisions to remain with or leave the company that Hall can begin to cast the remaining roles. Though incoming members are therefore slightly disadvantaged by this process in that they are brought in to perform specific parts, these parts are in no way marked as inferior. As has been discussed earlier in this project, Nick Asbury returned to the company after a thirteen year absence and was cast in the role of Polixenes. Furthermore, many actors have been cast as lead roles in their Propeller debut, including Tam Williams tripling the roles of Mamillius, Time, and Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* (2005) and Joseph Chance's performance of Viola in the revival of *Twelfth Night* (2013). This supports Myles' assertion that any Propeller actor is considered able to play any part within a production.

Or even, any parts. The example of Tam Williams' Propeller debut concerns an instance of significant tripling within a production, with Williams performing three separate roles which are nonetheless thematically linked. Williams' tripling was repeated in the casting pattern of the 2012 production, with Ben Allen likewise making his Propeller debut. In both productions the doubling of Mamillius and Perdita was particularly important as it was central to Hall's conception of the play as Mamillius' story. This casting emphasized the consequences of Leontes' actions and linked the disparate kingdoms of Sicilia and Bohemia. Writing about the 2005 production, Michael Dobson found that "the rediscovered daughter was always and also the marker of the unrestored son, simultaneously comic heroine and tragic ghost."<sup>120</sup> This point was made strikingly clear when a quick, onstage costume change left Leontes alone with Mamillius in the production's final moment:

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<sup>120</sup> Michael Dobson, "Shakespeare Performances in England, 2005," *Shakespeare Survey* 59 (2006), 317.

*Leontes has been reunited with Hermione. Overcome with joy, he attempts a reconciliation, promising Paulina Camillo's hand in marriage and encouraging Hermione and Polixenes to renew their friendship. He bids Paulina to "Hastily lead away." As the others exit the stage, the lights begin to dim, leaving the only illumination on stage the single candle Paulina holds in her hand. Slowly, she crosses to Leontes and hands him the candle before exiting. Leontes attempts to follow the courtiers out, moving first towards Hermione and then towards Polixenes, but he is halted by an unexpected sight. Now, instead of Perdita, he sees Mamillius (the effect of a quick upstage costume change). Leontes gives a cry of joy and steps towards him. In response, Mamillius sadly shakes his head and blows out the candle, plunging the theatre into darkness.*<sup>121</sup>

Where, moments before, the king had enjoyed a reunion with his lost daughter, he now stood facing the son he could never reclaim. Consequence, grief, memory, and the limits of redemption were all touched upon in this moment, which was made possible through the use of a single actor in both parts; a decision that was considered by Alistair McAuley to be "revelatory" in 2005.<sup>122</sup>

The act of doubling has been an important part of Propeller's production style, though it has not always been used with such intentional effect as it was in *The Winter's Tale*. The Watermill's budget and small stage space limited the original company size to eleven actors in 1997. Since then, the largest number Propeller has employed for a single contract has been fourteen. Such a small number of actors requires liberal doubling so as to fulfill the requirements of Shakespeare's stories and is an example of the deficiency casting that was loathed by the Victorians.<sup>123</sup> However, deficiency casting was also a feature of the early modern playhouse, where doubling was common and expected. According to David Bevington, early modern "popular tradition found doubling to be an indispensable, inevitable, and congenial technique

<sup>121</sup> This moment was consistent across both productions.

<sup>122</sup> Alistair McAuley, "The Winter's Tale, The Watermill Theatre, Newbury" *The Financial Times*, 2 February 2005, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/37243810-74c1-11d9-a769-00000e2511c8.html>, accessed 20 June 2015.

<sup>123</sup> Coen Heijes, "'Thus play I in one person many people': The art and craft of doubling in the Boyd history cycle," *Shakespeare* 6, no. 1, (2010), 53.

of dramatic construction,” indicating the expectation of doubling was strong enough to be a factor during a play’s authorship.<sup>124</sup> Due to the choric presence, almost every actor winds up doubling in a Propeller production, but Propeller’s small cast size encourages the doubling of named characters as well. The unintended consequence of Propeller’s practical reliance on doubling is that within the practice are elements of the “traditional methods” which Hall was seeking to emulate. Practical casting can lead to unintentionally significant casting — usually consciously “employed by directors and actors as a vehicle of meaning” — across productions, as well as provide the actor with performance opportunities that expand his range and keep him engaged with the production as a whole.<sup>125</sup>

Unlike the re-staging of *The Winter’s Tale*, 2011’s *Henry V* was performed with a different doubling pattern than that of its predecessor. The fact that many other features of that original production were retained in 2011 indicates that the doubling in the original production was largely due to practical concerns rather than artistic aims, but practical doubling can still achieve notable benefits within performance. In the restaged *Henry V*, Myles performed the roles of Exeter and Alice which, though belonging to the same functional category, showed markedly different characterizations and performance registers. Exeter is Henry’s uncle, older and more experienced than the king. He encourages Henry to go to war (“Your brother kings and monarchs of the earth / Do all expect that you should rouse yourself”), threatens the French court with promise of destruction (“for if you hide the crown / Even in your hearts, there will he rake for it”), and delivers reports of deaths on the field at

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<sup>124</sup> David M. Bevington, *From Mankind to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (Cambridge, USA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 73.

<sup>125</sup> Heijes, “Thus play I in one person many people,” 54.

Agincourt (“Suffolk first died, and York, all haggled over / Comes to him [...]”).<sup>126</sup>

His interactions relate to the business of war and leave little room for humor or audience connection. Myles’ performance reflected the seriousness of the character, whom he interpreted as a tough, stern soldier, and he says his experience on the pre-rehearsal army training courses was instrumental in creating his performance.<sup>127</sup>

Physically, Myles’ Exeter used sharp military movements, carried himself with a rigid posture, and spoke with a crisp, biting vocal delivery.

As with Exeter, Alice was an advisor to royalty, older than her charge, and had experience which she imparted to Katherine in the guise of English lessons. Unlike Exeter, however, Alice is written as a humorous role, and Myles was able to contrast the straight performance of the former with his comedic turn as Alice. For Alice, Myles spoke with a French accent (though did not change the pitch of his voice), placed his weight slightly to one side, and allowed his arms to move more fluidly than Exeter’s. Myles’ vocal adjustments accounted for the differences in nationalities between the two characters, while his physicality differentiated between male and female, militant and civilian, and formal and informal contrasts between the advisors. While Exeter adhered to the strict protocol governing interactions between himself and the king and kept his emotions in check, Alice’s relationship with Katherine (Karl Davies) was more relaxed. Because Alice was not a character bound by etiquette, Myles was able to communicate Alice’s emotions through exaggerated facial expressions which routinely drew laughs from spectators and established an indirect line of communication between the stage and the auditorium. As well as forming a connection with audiences through eliciting laughter, Myles’ Alice also had moments

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<sup>126</sup> Edward Hall and Roger Warren, eds. *Propeller Shakespeare: Henry V* (London: Oberon Books, Ltd., 2012), 27, 45, 84.

<sup>127</sup> Myles, personal interview.

of direct contact. As spectators took their seats for the second half of the production, Myles walked through the aisles of the auditorium, chatting with patrons in French and mocking the musical talents of the onstage solider-chorus. Exeter belonged firmly to the fictional world of *Henry V* while Alice bridged the fiction of Shakespeare's story and its reality as a theatre performance, providing a contrast not only in the characters Myles performed but also in the way in which audiences were invited to respond to them.

Myles' double performance in *Henry V* shows how casting can increase performance opportunities for as an actor, but it also has an impact on how spectators perceive the production as a whole. If actors appear repeatedly onstage as different characters, that character's identity as a temporary creation is reinforced. In *Popular Shakespeare*, Stephen Purcell uses instances of doubling in productions by Annie Castledine, Mike Alfreds, and Peter Brook as examples of creating theatre that demands audience complicity.<sup>128</sup> In instances of doubling, the story only functions if the spectator chooses to recognize the change. The performance effects achieved from practical doubling derive their impact from the act itself and occur regardless of which roles are linked within a production. As discussed in chapter 2, this effect extends to the doubling which occurs between the choric and named characters, and in this way casting contributes to Propeller's overall production aesthetic which seeks to continuously draw attention to the act of playing within a performance.

Moreover, doubling is a practice which helps re-constitute Shakespeare's plays as suitable for ensemble performance. Doubling fell out of fashion in the age of Victorian spectacle, when having an actor play more than one role was an admission

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<sup>128</sup> Stephen Purcell, *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* (Basingstoke: Palsgrave, 2009), 25, 144.



of limited resources and something to be avoided.<sup>129</sup> This attitude has prevailed, resulting in an opinion of Shakespeare's plays as inherently hierarchical in their casting requirements. Sally Beuman credits Shakespeare's play structure as a fundamental stumbling block of the RSC's early ensemble attempts:

Shakespeare's plays, unlike, say, Chekov's, do not naturally lend themselves to ensemble work. Most of his plays, and particularly the tragedies, are hierarchic in cast terms; they contain one or two roles that remain the mountain peaks of theatre, then a range of strong supporting parts, then a large number of brilliantly observed but tiny parts.<sup>130</sup>

Beuman's view of Shakespeare's plays assumes each actor's contribution is limited to a specific named character, discounting the potential of individual contribution to be expanded through the doubling or tripling of roles. Colin Chambers likewise points to the basic structure of Shakespeare's plays as working against the appeal of collective playing since, at the RSC, "there was no tradition of ensemble playing, and Shakespeare's plays did not offer an even-handed gender mix or distribution of parts."<sup>131</sup> Chambers' concern with "distribution of parts" echoes Beuman's assumption regarding casting, but also touches on the uneven gender distribution within the plays as part of their hierarchical structure. Character gender, however, is not a concern in Propeller's single-sex company. Because Propeller does not attempt to match the sex of the actor with that of the character, there is greater potential for doubling than the co-ed companies to which Beuman and Chambers reference.

Due to the large number of actors who choose to take advantage of Propeller's first-refusal casting policy, in many cases spectators are not only able to compare an actor's performance within a production, but also across multiple productions. Since

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<sup>129</sup> Heijes, "Thus play I in one person many people," 53.

<sup>130</sup> Beuman, 245.

<sup>131</sup> Colin Chambers, "'Home. Sweet Home': Stratford-upon-Avon and the Making of the Royal Shakespeare Company as a National Institution," in *Talking Shakespeare: Shakespeare into the Millennium*, ed. Deborah Cartmell and Michael Scott (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 95.

the company moved to a repertory system in 2007, Hall has striven to “give the actors different experiences in the two plays they’re doing,” as a way of keeping the work “fresh” throughout lengthy tours.<sup>132</sup> Audiences who viewed both *Henry V* and *The Winter’s Tale* would have recognized Myles performing a similar type of role across two different productions, a combination which provides a visual clue towards the characters’ position within the narrative as well as provides a foundation for comparison regarding the actor’s range.

The extent to which casting across productions creates meaning is determined by each individual spectator’s relationship with the company. At the same time that Propeller has continuously sought out new audiences, it has also established for itself a loyal fan base of spectators who return time and time again. In a fan letter reproduced in *Shakespeare Survey*, Rebecca Widdowson references her appreciation of “being able to know you as an ensemble, troupe” based on multiple Propeller productions over a number of years.<sup>133</sup> Repeat viewings are facilitated by Propeller’s touring schedule, which regularly includes such theatres as the Yvonne Arnaud in Guildford, the Everyman Theatre in Cheltenham, and the Rose Theatre in Kingston. When the company’s Arts Council funding was cut in 2014, a petition to reinstate funding collected 2,774 signatures, many of which referred to the signatories’ long-standing familiarity with the company.<sup>134</sup> These repeated visits provide audiences an opportunity to see multiple productions, viewing Propeller’s production as both individual interpretations of Shakespeare’s plays as well as part of a larger body of

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<sup>132</sup> “Edward Hall on Propeller’s *Henry V* and *The Winter’s Tale*.”

<sup>133</sup> Michael Pavelka, “Making the Work of Play,” in conversation with Carol Chillington Rutter, *Shakespeare Survey* 66 (2013), 143.

<sup>134</sup> Megan Collins, “This petition is to make The Arts Council of England reconsider their 100% funding cut from Propeller Theatre Company,” <https://www.change.org/p/alan-davey-this-petition-is-to-make-the-arts-council-of-england-reconsider-their-100-funding-cut-from-propeller-theatre-company>, accessed 16 April 2015.

work. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to assume a certain proportion of Propeller's audience is able to recognize patterns in casting across multiple productions and tours.

An example of the roles taking on cumulative meaning is Myles' performance as the Abbess in the 2011 production of *The Comedy of Errors*. Though not written as a comedic female role, the Abbess continued a performance tradition formed by Myles' previous characterizations of Maria and Nerissa. First appearing onstage in a cloud of dry ice to the strains of "Heaven is a Place on Earth," Myles' Abbess wore a short purple nun's habit that left plenty of fish-netted leg visible above her purple patent leather high-heeled boots and carried a riding crop that identified the Abbess as the proprietor of a fetish club rather than a holy leader. Within the world of *Comedy*, this costume and property contributed to the overall production theme of artificiality and identity by displaying the Abbess' religion as an affectation, but it also drew connections to Myles' previous performances through repetition of certain elements. The fishnet stockings were similar to the ones Myles had worn as Nerissa in *The Merchant of Venice*, a character whose outward show of femininity was another type of affectation, designed to garner power within that production's prison setting. Meanwhile, the Abbess' riding crop carried with it connotations of the same kind of brash sexuality that Myles had brought out in his performance as Maria in *Twelfth Night* (2007). Sauciness is a quality that exists comfortably in Olivia's waiting-woman but is unexpected in the leader of a holy order, showing how Myles' previous performance history can be seen to inspire a reinterpretation of one of Shakespeare's characters. In my own experience watching Propeller productions, I associate Myles with a certain type of female character — arch, witty, strong, sexual — and therefore view his performances both as creating a specific character within the narrative and as a new contribution to his own performance text.

In this example, the potential for the practical casting required by Propeller's first-refusal casting policy to become significant casting depends on the spectator's familiarity with the company's actors. These performances build upon each other, reaffirming Propeller's history as an ensemble company with a shared, collective body of work. The mechanics of this kind of "doubling," which carries through seemingly unlinked productions, is similar to the continuity enjoyed by Elizabethan playing companies.<sup>135</sup> The stability of these early companies meant they could assume a certain level of familiarity between spectator and performer, just as Propeller has formed a loyal fan base who have grown to know and recognize those actors who return for multiple tours. The first-refusal casting policy has resulted in actors, such as Myles, being able to demonstrate their range through number of characters and build their own performance histories across multiple productions. Due to Propeller's maintenance of a single-sex acting company, many of the roles that contribute to forming these performance histories are female. The final consequence of the first-refusal casting policy that I wish to address is the preservation of the Propeller's status as a single-sex company and its resulting personation of Shakespeare's female characters.

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### **Propeller's Personation of Women**

The impetus to invite actors back time and time again has solidified since the initial all-male casting of *Henry V* — originally a way to populate the soldier-chorus and clearly frame the story as a play-within-a-play — becoming the company's defining feature. Edward Hall tends to characterize the artistic reasoning behind this

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<sup>135</sup> David Grote, *The Best Actors in the World: Shakespeare and His Acting Company* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 1; Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642* 4th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 57.

choice through references to “traditional methods,” but when pushed on the subject admits, “It was probably more to do with the group of actors I was working with than it was to do with any great crusade to explore gender politics, because that’s very much not at the forefront of our manifesto.”<sup>136</sup> Hall’s exclusion of gender politics from Propeller’s “manifesto” — itself a troubling term, considering Propeller developed organically over time — attempts to de-politicize the choice to retain single-sex casting and re-categorizes it as yet another example of Hall’s personal views significantly shaping Propeller’s evolution. Single-sex casting serves as further evidence of Propeller’s company policies forming organically around production choices originating with Hall’s approach to *Henry V* rather than deriving from a pre-determined course for creating a permanent ensemble company.

What this has led to is a muddled set of justifications for the choice, including references to original practice as well as theatre’s imaginative capacity. Meanwhile, Propeller’s production history shows an inconsistent use of the artistic potential of its all-male cast. In productions such as *Henry V*, *Rose Rage* or, discussed at length in the final chapter, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merchant of Venice*, the all-male cast is carefully matched with a conceptual framework. In other productions, such as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* or *The Winter’s Tale*, the conceit becomes more problematic, the particular interpretations less clearly articulated. Which begs the question: if Propeller’s choric element does not necessitate an all-male cast, what, if any, advantage does it give the company in performance? A close examination of the different types of female personation present in the 2012 *The Winter’s Tale* and the different audience responses each is meant to evoke reveals the extent to which the

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<sup>136</sup> Edward Hall, quoted in Laura Collins-Hughes, “Yes, it’s the Bard, and it’s in your face,” *The Boston Globe*, 15 May 2011, [http://www.boston.com/yourtown/boston/fenway\\_kenmore/articles/2011/05/15/propeller\\_theatre\\_company\\_makes\\_boston\\_debut\\_this\\_week/](http://www.boston.com/yourtown/boston/fenway_kenmore/articles/2011/05/15/propeller_theatre_company_makes_boston_debut_this_week/), accessed 25 June 2014.

benefits of Propeller's single-sex casting derive not from a specifically *male* cast but from the cross-gender casting that draws attention to the performative nature of theatre.

*The Winter's Tale* offers a catalogue of female personation, each with its own specific dissonance. The terms defined in Jennifer Drouin's essay "Cross-Dressing, Drag, and Passing: Slippages in Shakespearean Comedy" are ones which I will draw on to categorize the different types of female personation present in Propeller's productions.<sup>137</sup> To do this requires adapting them to the specific task of examining their uses as applied to theatrical performance, as Drouin differentiates between cross-dressing as "a theatrical practice adopted by actors" and drag and passing which are "practices outside the theatre."<sup>138</sup> By transposing Drouin's terms from describing the characters' relationships within Shakespeare's plays to the performer/spectator relationship, I demonstrate how Propeller's personation of women contributes to the company's broader goals of audience engagement.

As defined by Drouin, "The goal of theatrical cross-dressing is usually the goal of realist theater itself — to present the audience with a situation that mirrors real life; and while this may require a suspension of disbelief, the less required the better."<sup>139</sup> According to this description, the term defines all instances of onstage female personation, but I want to narrow its focus and look instead at moments where the male *character* chooses to cross-dress within the driving action to perform a female role for spectators within the presentation world of the play. Unlike instances of a choric character taking on a female role in a play-within-a-play defined by one of Propeller's

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<sup>137</sup> Jennifer Drouin, "Cross-Dressing, Drag and Passing: Slippages in Shakespearean Comedy," in *Shakespeare Redressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance*, ed. James C. Bulman (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), 23-56.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

metatheatrical frameworks, the cross-dressing I am interested in is that which takes place when these fictional spectators are unaware of the performance, such as Viola's disguise as Cesario or Portia's appearance as Balthazar.

To date, there is only one instance of male-to-female cross-dressing of this kind within a Propeller production: Chris Myles' Camillo disguising himself as a Girl Guide in 2012's *The Winter's Tale*. This disguise was not included in the 2005 production, and is an invention of the company rather than demanded of Shakespeare's text, which simply indicates the king and courtier should be unrecognizable. Myles' pig-tailed wig and blue skirt were in sharp contrast to his very visible pencil moustache, and the costume was used to humorous effect by drawing attention to the fact that the attendants of the sheep-shearing feast accepted such an obvious disguise. The moment where Myles accidentally spoke in a lower register reminded the spectators in the audience of Camillo's male gender, which was made all the more pointed as his overcorrection to higher voice was momentary and not sustained as a permanent fixture of his "role" as Girl Guide.<sup>140</sup> The eventual onstage revelation of Camillo's identity to those around him reinforced Camillo's male identity and signaled the end of the character's performance, returning him to his "true" gender though retaining the signifiers that had marked him as female. As Camillo helped Florizel and Perdita devise an escape to Sicilia, audiences in the auditorium were presented with two contrasting female images: Camillo's disguise and the costume worn by Ben Allen as Perdita. Placing these two images side-by-side required spectators to recognize the different types of performativity being employed in the moment, disrupting their ability to un-discerningly apply a blanket system of

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<sup>140</sup> A similar moment occurred in the Cheek by Jowl *As You Like It* (1991) when Adrian Lester as Rosalind attempted to perform as the masculine Ganymede through vocal experimentation and assumed masculine posture. Alisa Solomon, *Re-Dressing the Canon: Essays on theatre and gender* (London: Routledge, 1997), 35.

signification across the production. Instead, spectators were asked to actively negotiate the interplay between male performance / female character according to the different criteria defined by the narrative.

There are similarities between Myles' performance as a cross-dressed Camillo and Gunnar Cauthery and Richard Dempsey's drag performances as the shepherdesses Dorcas and Mopsa, but the key difference is how the latter garnered sustained acceptance within the narrative fiction. Mopsa and Dorcas were never given a moment of slippage in the eyes of the Bohemians, and were accepted as "true" females within Propeller's *Winter's Tale*, though their behavior was that of caricatured women. That same caricatured performance style, however, drew the offstage audience's attention to the artificiality of the female performance, rendering them as examples of the "self-referential and parodic" potential of drag discussed by Drouin. Without tempering this performance through other components in the production, Propeller's drag performances have the potential to represent the misogynistic view of drag as a ridiculing female experience.<sup>141</sup> Propeller achieves this tempering by counter-pointing the drag performances with moments which deny the strict definition of "male" and "female" tendencies. In 2005, "[t]he shepherdesses Mosca [*sic*] and Dorcas wore midriff bearing tops which showed off their six-pack abs and chewed gum like a couple of toughies," the male actors presenting female characters who, in turn, perform masculine behaviors.<sup>142</sup> In the 2012 production, Autolycus' ballad "Two Maids Wooing a Man" was performed to the melody of Beyoncé's "Single Ladies," complete with the music video's Fosse-inspired choreography. The Young Shepherd's participation in the dancing momentarily cast him as one of the

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<sup>141</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 86.

<sup>142</sup> Jane Collins, "The *Winter's Tale*," *Shakespeare Bulletin* 24, no. 2 (2006), 119.



single ladies, connecting the character to the women in the original video, the “women” onstage, and the larger LGBT community outside of the theatre which has embraced the song as one of its anthems.

In these examples, the men altered their voices in some moments, wore wigs, and enacted cartoonish instances of stereotypical femininity (Myles’ prancing, Cauthery and Dempsey preening, flouncing, and sniping at each other over a man), producing performances with aims towards comedic effect. As described by Myles, the decision as to how to portray women by the company corresponds with the desired effect on the audience:

When we want comic effect we tend to go [...] more for drag, and it’s something you can get out of knowing it’s a man playing a woman. It’s funny because it’s a man with a wig or, in the case of Flute, it’s a man with rubber gloves down his front. And then that’s counter-balanced by Hermione and Margaret and Viola and Olivia where you know it’s a man but it’s deadly serious. We’re not asking them to laugh at them, we’re asking them to empathize with these women. And so as far as possible we want, while at the same saying, “Yes, it’s a man,” to keep away from any sense that we’re sending up our women or their behavior.<sup>143</sup>

Myles draws a distinction in this description between the two types of performance based on whether the company wants the audience to “laugh at” the female characters or “empathize” with them, drawing attention to the desired performance effect. The challenge for the company is to balance using female personation for comedic effect while also not “sending up” the behaviors of women in those roles that are not deemed “deadly serious.” Myles’ cameo of the Girl Guide managed this balance because it was a self-contained instance of cross-dressing, a male character not only attempting to pass for woman but also for a child, and doing both so badly there was no danger of the performance being read as accurate impersonation. In

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<sup>143</sup> Myles, personal interview.

Cauthery and Dempsey's performances, the shifts between "feminine" and "masculine" behaviors highlighted the stereotypical nature of both, preventing either from marking a naturalistic performance meant to accurately mimic women's behavior. Spectators were prevented from regarding the caricatured as true because the earlier use of men-as-women in the "serious" roles of Paulina and Hermione forestalled "inappropriate efforts to read [the production] as wholly realist."<sup>144</sup>

The roles of Hermione, Paulina, and Perdita are examples of the third type of female personation Propeller engages with, that of "passing." Drouin defines the aim of passing as "to signify not the fluidity of gender, but rather one's firm entrenchment within its fixed-sex-categories."<sup>145</sup> In Propeller, passing occurs in instances of female personation wherein the male actor is accepted by both characters in the narrative and spectators in the audience as female and where the gap between actor/character is neither exacerbated nor erased. In the example of Hermione, doubled with Dorcas by Richard Dempsey, spectators were consistently asked to focus on the female character rather than the male actor. While both remained present, there were no choreographed moments of slippage such as those demonstrated by Myles, nor was attention consciously drawn to the physical reality of the male actor. As Dorcas, Dempsey raised the register of his voice and adopted a slightly nasal quality, made exaggerated facial expressions and gestures, and wore a very obvious wig, all of which signaled a broad performance of a woman. In contrast, he made no notable vocal alterations in his performance as Hermione and moved with a careful stateliness which nonetheless read as natural, rather than performative, movement. Whereas Dempsey's performance as Dorcas constantly drew attention to its own artificiality, his

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<sup>144</sup> Dobson, 316.

<sup>145</sup> Drouin, 30.

performance as Hermione was closer to naturalism, rendering her more “real” within the world of the play. These contrasting performances built upon the contrasting situations and lines that define each character within Shakespeare’s text. Dempsey’s performance of a nuanced, sympathetic female character with complicated motives and relationships within the world of the play set a standard against which his comedic drag performance was recognized as superficial.

Alongside Myles’ rare performance as a cross-dressed male character, *The Winter’s Tale* offered another isolated example of a certain kind of personation by requiring a male actor to perform the character of a pregnant woman. As Hermione, Dempsey wore a pregnancy bump in his first few scenes which was completely covered by his long silk dress, giving the impression of a female pregnant body beneath. At the trial, he appeared in a bloodstained nightshirt which similarly asked spectators to imagine Hermione’s biologically female body by providing a visual marker of childbirth. The use of visual signifiers to overwrite the male actor’s body with the impression of a female one stresses the importance of “seeing” the biological female despite its acknowledged absence so as to empathize with Hermione’s experience within the play. When asked about the pregnancy bump, Myles acknowledged there had been discussion of foregoing it, but in the end it was deemed necessary because it “permanently remind[ed]” the audience of her physical state.<sup>146</sup> On more than one occasion, audiences audibly reacted in shock when Robert Hands’ Leontes violently punched Richard Dempsey’s Hermione in the stomach, illustrating willingness of audience members to embrace Hermione as a “real” pregnant woman.<sup>147</sup> The ghosting of Hermione’s pregnant female body over that of male actor acknowledged

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<sup>146</sup> Myles, personal interview.

<sup>147</sup> Based on my own observations seeing the production across four tour stops (Cheltenham, Kingston, Coventry, and London).

the performative nature of theatre at the same time that it used visual signifiers to encourage empathy with the character within the story.

The preservation of this dual consciousness even as the experience of certain female characters is treated as “deadly serious” sets Propeller apart from other companies which view single-sex casting as an opportunity for increased illusion. According to Gary Taylor, the male actors who depicted female characters on the Elizabethan stage were concerned with female mimicry, the goal of such performances to be unquestionably accepted by the audience as women, to replace the actor’s “he” with “she,” and this is the attitude currently taken by “original practice” (OP) productions at Shakespeare’s Globe.<sup>148</sup> Actor Paul Chahidi, who played Maria in the Globe’s all-male OP *Twelfth Night*, described how he “wanted it to be truthful and be real, for the audiences to forget that the actor was a man.”<sup>149</sup> By attempting to hide the male actor within the female character, Chahidi created a performance goal for both himself and the production. His desire to be “truthful” and “real” indicates a reality against which he will be compared, a goal that he is striving to achieve and which the audience will then judge. Chahidi’s desire to make the audience “forget” is reflected in the stance of then-artistic director Mark Rylance, who

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<sup>148</sup> Gary Taylor, “Shakespeare plays on the Renaissance Stages,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage*, eds. Stanley Wells and Sarah Stanton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 10. Taylor represents one view of the debate surrounding the Elizabethan boy actress, but is by no means unchallenged in his opinion. As Barker demonstrates, there is “no consensus concerning [the boy actress] reception within his own cultural context.” Moreover, the use of boy actresses on the Elizabethan stage offers another point of departure between contemporary all-male casts and Elizabethan staging practice, as professional companies do not cast pre-pubescent boys as women. To what extent this goes against “original practices” is contingent on whether one ascribes to the belief that all female parts were played by boy-actresses, as reflected in the scholarship of Taylor and Penny Gay, or the belief that the boy-actresses were part of a larger pool of actors of all ages able to take on the female roles, as posited by Carol Chillington Rutter and M.C. Bradbrook. Roberta Barker, “Acting Against the Rules: Remembering the Eroticism of the Shakespearean Boy Actress,” in *Shakespeare Re-Dressed: Cross-Gender Casting in Contemporary Performance*, ed. James C. Bulman (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), 58. Penny Gay, “Women and Shakespearean performance,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage*, eds. Stanley Wells and Sarah Stanton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 155-156; Carol Chillington Rutter, ed., *Documents of the Rose Playhouse* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 124-125; M. C. Bradbrook, *Shakespeare: The Poet in His World* (London: Widenfield and Nicolson, 1978), 213; Abigail Rokison, “Authenticity in the twenty-first century: Propeller and Shakespeare’s Globe,” in *Shakespeare in Stages: New Theatre Histories*, eds. Christine Dymkowski and Christie Carson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 75.

<sup>149</sup> Mark Rylance, Yolanda Vazquez and Paul Chahidi, “Discoveries from the Globe Stage,” in *Shakespeare’s Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*, eds. Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 208.

is described by David Jays as believing Globe audiences “prefer to remain spellbound,” casting spectators as the subjects of the actors’ illusion.<sup>150</sup> Using performance artist Allan Kaprow’s dichotomy, this approach reconstitutes the performance of women by male actors not as play, but as gaming:

Gaming involves winning or losing a desired goal. Playing is open-ended and, potentially, everybody “wins.” Playing has no stated purpose other than more playing. It is usually not serious in content or attitude, whereas gaming, which can also involve playing if it is subordinated to winning, is at heart competitive.<sup>151</sup>

If the actor makes the audience forget his sex, he wins. If the audience sees through his female performance to the male actor, the actor loses. There is enjoyment in competition, and a competitive relationship is not necessarily an adversarial one, but it does put performer and spectator on opposite sides, trying to catch each other out rather than help one another.

In contrast, Propeller’s actors reference the all-male casting as an opportunity to create a point of shared enterprise with audiences. Actor Simon Scardifield’s description sees the imaginative complicity demanded of audiences as intrinsic to the idea of theatre as “play,” which is central to Propeller’s performance approach:

We find that it's pointless trying to hoodwink an audience. It will always be obvious that I am a bloke — a woman with a chest as hairy as mine would be at the circus. We do what Shakespeare did, which is ask the audience to believe in what is clearly not fact. It's better than that - it's a story, it's part of the fun, it's theatre, and that's a ploy that works. It's a kind of imaginative participation that television has taught us to neglect, but everyone does it very readily given the chance so I can get on with the part without worrying about putting on a voice that isn't mine or whether my wig is slipping.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> David Jays, “Gender Agenda: David Jays Considers the Role of the Boy Actor,” *RSC Magazine* 19 (Summer 2000), 20.

<sup>151</sup> Allan Kaprow, “Just Doing,” in *The Performance Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Bial, 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 161.

<sup>152</sup> Caroline Taylor, “Play’s leading lady is a man!,” *This is Lancashire*, 16 April 2007 [http://www.thisislancashire.co.uk/news/1331628.plays\\_leading\\_lady\\_is\\_a\\_man/](http://www.thisislancashire.co.uk/news/1331628.plays_leading_lady_is_a_man/), accessed 20 June 2015.

Scardifield dismisses efforts to impersonate a woman as “pointless” and anticipates that an attempt of the part of the actor to do so would result in failure, placing him on the losing side of the gaming scenario found in Chahidi’s approach. The Propeller approach can be found in honoring “what Shakespeare did,” but Scardifield uses the phrase to describe the spirit of collusion between actor and spectator rather than the mechanics of performance that would render a male actor female in the eyes of the audience. Actor Richard Clothier echoes these statements in his assertion that asking spectators to accept a man as a woman within the presentational world “opens the door to the possibility of a far less passive act in watching the play” and Ben Allen and Jon Trenchard both feel the practice makes audiences “complicit” in creating the story.<sup>153</sup> These statements show Propeller’s actors recognizing the potential for cross-gender casting to inspire an active form of spectatorship, thereby demonstrating the advantage of the practice regardless of its particular production aims or gender of the actor.

Scardifield touches on another important point regarding Propeller’s personation of women in referencing his ability to “get on with the part without worrying about putting on a voice that isn’t mine or whether my wig is slipping.” As has already been shown, affectations and costume pieces are sometimes used to emphasize the artificiality of the female presence onstage when comedic “drag” performances are employed. What Scardifield is referring to is the process by which the passing roles are rehearsed and performed, and this reveals another difference between Propeller’s process and other single-sex productions. When interviewed during the 2006/7 *The Taming of the Shrew/Twelfth Night* tour, Scardifield emphasized

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<sup>153</sup> Clothier, quoted in “Bard propelled in new directions;” Ben Allen, “A sister, you are she: Playing women in Shakespeare,” Propeller Play, <http://propeller.org.uk/play/twelfth-night#/acting/read>, accessed 7 July 2015; Trenchard, personal interview.

that “None of us taking female roles try to look or sound like women,” and Hall himself has commented that “The one thing you mustn't do is try to present what you think a woman is.”<sup>154</sup> Instead of consciously trying to ape a woman's movement and bearing, Propeller actors respond to the physical adjustments required by their costumes and the character's lines to define the character as a person rather than specifically a woman.<sup>155</sup> To do otherwise would be to dabble in the dangerous assumption that there is an intrinsically “female” way of moving, speaking, and acting which negates the idea of female individuality.<sup>156</sup> Eschewing attempts to mimic female behavior in the passing roles prioritizes the character's humanity over gender, contributing to the complicated interplay between the different types of female personation found within a Propeller production.

Just as the actors prepare for a certain type of female personation, Propeller's audiences are likewise prepared for Propeller's usage of all-male casting through each production's opening moments that present gender performativity as part of a larger set of theatrical conventions. In 2012, audiences entered the auditorium to see a set resembling a sleek foyer, later identified as the Sicilian palace. The antiseptic quality of the smooth, reflective walls and the polished grand piano was offset by a child's

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<sup>154</sup> Quoted in Peggy Woodcock, “Pregnant pause for a swell role, *The Chester Chronicle*, <http://www.chesterchronicle.co.uk/whats-on/find-things-to-do/pregnant-pause-for-swell-role-5286456>, accessed 25 April 2013 (link since removed); Quoted in Jones.

<sup>155</sup> “Dominic takes the good with the Bard,” *The Star*, 14 January 2011, <http://www.thestar.co.uk/what-s-on/theatre/dominic-takes-the-good-with-bard-1-2993861>, accessed 25 April 2013; Jane Edwardes, “In the company of men: Twelfth Night and The Taming of the Shrew,” *TimeOut London*, 8 January 2007, <http://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/in-the-company-of-men-twelfth-night-and-the-taming-of-the-shrew>, accessed 16 June 2015.

<sup>156</sup> Such an approach is found at Shakespeare's Globe. Chahidi talks about sessions where he and his fellow cross-cast actors “observed” and “aped” the movement of women and discussed with their (male) director the differences between stereotypical male and female movement. Though Cheek by Jowl was not attempting to create the illusion of women onstage in its 1991 production of *As You Like It*, actor Joe Dixon's description of the rehearsal is similarly reductive, as he describes how “We all improvised as women, and by seeing other people's mistakes those playing women could see what not to do.” This practice cuts both ways — Phyllida Lloyd's 2003 all-female cast of *The Taming of the Shrew* “sought to play generalized blokes, rather than to inhabit real humans whose story-function outweighed gender conventions.” Rylance, Vasquez and Chahidi, 207-208; Simon Reade, *Cheek by Jowl: Ten Years of Celebration*, (Bath: Absolute Classic, 1991), 95; G. B. Shand, “Guying the Guys and Girling the Shrew: (Post)Feminist Fun at Shakespeare's Globe,” in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, eds. Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 561.

wagon, downstage center, and a number of wooden artist's mannequins. Unadorned, the mannequins' neutral appearance lacked either gender or identity. They were anonymous figures, waiting to be given meaning. A young man in pajamas, his clothes identifying him as a child within the world of the production, entered from a set of doors upstage center and crossed to the wagon. Kneeling down, he drew three mannequins from the wagon. Unlike the bare mannequins that populated the stage, these mannequins were costumed. Two were adorned in miniature dinner jackets, while the third wore a grey silk dress and stood between the others, a woman caught between two men. As these mannequins were revealed, black suited men, fingering brandy glasses, materialized from the wings. The boy lit a candle. "Sicilia cannot show himself to be overkind to Bohemia" said one of the suited men and as he did so, the boy held up his candle to illuminate first Leontes (Robert Hands) and Polixenes (Nick Asbury), wearing the same dinner jackets that costumed the mannequins. Just as the dinner jackets altered the neutral mannequins/actors into male rulers, themselves representations of "Sicilia" and "Bohemia," so too did the grey silk dress "create" the image of the female Hermione on both the mannequin and actor.

Instead of asking to audiences to view the dressing prologue as independent of the main production, *The Winter's Tale's* opening established gender as a superficial attribute that could — and would — be constructed within the production through verbal and visual signifiers. Moreover, it explicitly referenced *all* characters as acts of performance by clearly equating Richard Dempsey's task of enacting Hermione with that of Nick Asbury and Robert Hands enacting Polixenes and Leontes, respectively. The audience was first invited to accept male actors as kings, knowing them to be no



such thing, and then asked to make a similar imaginative leap to accept a male actor as both ruler (Queen) and woman (Hermione).<sup>157</sup>

As Propeller gains in reputation and recognition, renewed interest in women's issues finds all-male casts drawing increased scrutiny and criticism. Seeing the production in 2005, Dominic Cavendish originally found the emotional impact elicited by Simon Scardifield's Hermione to be "partly down to his considerable talent as an actor [...] and partly down to the cross-dressing conceit itself, which accentuates the fact that, in this marriage, where equality should exist, there is none."<sup>158</sup> Seven years later, Cavendish "didn't emerge from either of the productions [*The Winter's Tale* or *Henry V*] feeling the exclusion of actresses was especially useful; in many ways it is just distracting," adding his voice to a growing chorus of public opinion pieces which pushed back against the notion of all-male casting.<sup>159</sup> Jo Caird specifically targeted Propeller in her 2011 piece for WhatsOnStage.com regarding the exclusionary aspect of all-male casting, and the company featured prominently in Catherine Love's response to the same in *The Guardian*, which was headed with a production still from *Richard III*.<sup>160</sup> During *The Winter's Tale* tour, Equity appealed to Arts Council England to work harder to address gender imbalance in subsidized theatre's programming, with *Henry V*/*The Winter's Tale* cited as part of a greater indictment of the Hampstead

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<sup>157</sup> Jones; Haugland; Ramon.

<sup>158</sup> Dominic Cavendish, "Midwinter night's dream," *The Telegraph*, 1 February 2005, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/3636162/Midwinter-nights-dream.html>, accessed 7 July 2015.

<sup>159</sup> Dominic Cavendish, "The Winter's Tale/ Henry V, Propeller Theatre, review," *The Telegraph*, 26 March 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/regional-shows/9167297/The-Winters-Tale-Henry-V-Propeller-Theatre-review.html>, accessed 7 July 2015.

<sup>160</sup> Jo Caird, "Parts for Women!," WhatsOnStage.com, 29 July 2011, [http://www.whatsonstage.com/west-end-theatre/news/07-2011/jo-caird-parts-for-women\\_8097.html](http://www.whatsonstage.com/west-end-theatre/news/07-2011/jo-caird-parts-for-women_8097.html), accessed 1 August 2014; Catherine Love, "The woman's part: is single-sex casting sexist?", *The Guardian*, 17 January 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2012/jan/17/single-sex-casting-sexist>, accessed 1 August 2014.

Theatre's overall gender imbalance (Edward Hall serves artistic director for both).<sup>161</sup>

These problems are compounded by Hall's allusions to possibly including women in the future, which resists firmly identifying Propeller as an all-male company and so subtly implies there is some specific reason women have not been cast thus far.<sup>162</sup>

With this scrutiny upon them, it is understandable why Propeller has increasingly turned to authentic practice to explain its single-sex status. As Alisa Solomon points out while discussing Cheek by Jowl, "historical precedent relieves the company of defending its choice of an all-male cast."<sup>163</sup> However, in doing so, the company does itself a disservice. To appeal to historical authenticity when Propeller elsewhere eschews attempts to recreate original performance conditions seems to both dismiss the criticism and ignore the true value of single-sex casting: its potential for dissonance. Imagining male actors as female characters frames each Propeller production as a piece of imaginative story-telling rather than an experiment in historical recreation. The practice reflects Hall's aim "to be more imaginative in a metaphorical sense, and therefore [...] to engage the audience's imagination in sometimes surprising ways."<sup>164</sup> By creating a number of different types of female personation, Propeller shows the different responses that can be elicited from spectators and encourages their engagement in creating a theatrical performance. If

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<sup>161</sup> "Equity calls on ACE to take action on imbalanced casting," *Equity*, 2 July 2012, <https://www.equity.org.uk/committees/womens-committee-2013-2015/news/equity-calls-on-ace-to-monitor-casting/>, accessed 1 August 2014; Edward Pleasance, "No equal opportunities on stage for our female actors," *Camden New Journal*, 21 June 2012, <http://www.camdennewjournal.com/letters/2012/jun/no-equal-opportunities-stage-our-female-actors>, accessed 1 August 2014. See also Stella Duffy, "Being Ignored and the Suggestion of a Monstrous Regime," *Not Writing but Blogging*, 27 June 2012, <https://stelladuffy.wordpress.com/2012/06/27/being-ignored-and-the-suggestion-of-a-monstrous-regime/>, accessed 1 August 2014; Jenni Tomlin, "Should our society be allowed to celebrate its historical sexism?," *Social Justice First*, 18 February 2012, <http://socialjusticefirst.com/2012/02/18/should-our-society-be-allowed-to-celebrate-its-historical-sexism/>, accessed 1 August 2014; Charlotte Higgins, "Actors' union rallies theatres to create more parts for women," *The Guardian*, 29 June 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/jun/29/actors-union-rallies-theatres-parts-women>, accessed 1 August 2014; Christopher Gray, "Girls' jobs going to the boys," *The Oxford Times*, 1 August 2012, [http://www.oxfordtimes.co.uk/news/gray\\_matter/9849859.Girls\\_jobs\\_going\\_to\\_the\\_boys/?ref=rss](http://www.oxfordtimes.co.uk/news/gray_matter/9849859.Girls_jobs_going_to_the_boys/?ref=rss), accessed 1 August 2014.

<sup>162</sup> Will Wollen, "Interview with Edward Hall - Director," *The Taming of the Shrew* education pack (Newbury: Watermill Theatre, 2006), 10.

<sup>163</sup> Solomon, 42.

<sup>164</sup> E. Hall, quoted in "Edward Hall on Propeller's Henry V and The Winter's Tale."

the company continues to cite “how Shakespeare did it” as reason enough to continue its single-sex policy, ignoring its origins and performative effects, it will also continue to invite scrutiny as to whether such practices can be justified in today’s theatre.

## The Propeller Rehearsal

The concept of family helps understand how actors understand their relationships with Propeller as a company, but does not adequately describe how the company practically functions. To do this, a helpful corollary to the rehearsal room is the classroom, where similarly a number of individuals of varying perspectives and backgrounds work toward a common goal under the direction of an authority figure. In *Encountering Ensemble*, John Britton notes the tendency of ensembles to prioritize specific types of training and acting technique over the final product, and from this observation it is not difficult to extrapolate the director overseeing such training from a position that characterizes him or her as a teaching figure.<sup>165</sup> As with the authoritarian father-director, there is a danger the teacher-director can become domineering and stifle creativity. Jonothan Neelands explains:

There is of course a tradition in theatre of the voices of the playwright and director dominating the work of actors and others involved in the performance and, as result, also dominating the range of meaning communicated to the audience. The same is invariably true for the teacher/leader involved in the process of matching convention to content.<sup>166</sup>

Neelands uses the director-as-teacher analogy as a warning to education practitioners, showing them the danger in assuming control to the point of stifling creativity and participation. However, if, as Neelands implies, the teacher can assume a more

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<sup>165</sup> Britton, 24-25.

<sup>166</sup> Jonothan Neelands, *Creating democratic citizenship through drama education: The writings of Jonothan Neelands*, ed. Peter O'Connor (London: Institute of Education Press, 2010), 28.

productive role in helping students create meaning within their lessons, and if the analogy between teacher and director holds true, it follows that their directorial parallels can also take an active but collaborative role in helping actors find their own meanings within a production.

The connection between the classroom and the rehearsal room illustrates how collaborative working environments inspire creativity in both, and is particularly applicable to the discussion of Propeller's choric presence. The connection between directing and teaching is often explicit, as many contemporary directors either also hold official teaching positions or have published educational volumes outlining the work they oversee in rehearsal.<sup>167</sup> Other directors — especially those pursuing ensemble practices — act as implicit instructors, gathering their actors for the purpose of experimentation and discovery. In 1970 Peter Brook fashioned his theatre company as a center for “research” that gave him the freedom to explore the theatrical form in unconventional ways, his own version of Jerzy Grotowski's theatrical “laboratory” in Poland.<sup>168</sup> More recently, Declan Donnellan's direction of *Cheek by Jowl* characterizes it as “an unofficial acting academy,” where Donnellan's approach to acting is taught to his actors.<sup>169</sup> Hall's guiding principles of actor focus and audience consideration, bolstered by Pavelka's consideration of the same in Propeller's aesthetic design, provides a philosophical principle that is passed down to Propeller's actors through their involvement in the company. Propeller actors learn on the job, similar to Emma Rice's view that, in *Kneehigh*, the “process itself is our training.”<sup>170</sup> Hall's

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<sup>167</sup> The connection between direction and teaching “features strongly” in Maria M. Delgado and Dan Rebellato's collection, *Contemporary European Theatre Directors*, identifying Daniel Mesguich, Lev Dodin, Thomas Ostermeier, Declan Donnellan, Katie Mitchell and Silvio Purcarete as directors for whom teaching forms a basis of their theatre work. *Contemporary European Theatre Director* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 17.

<sup>168</sup> Maria M. Delgado and Paul Heritage, eds., *In Contact with Gods?: Directors talk theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 53-54.

<sup>169</sup> Aleks Sierz, “Declan Donnellan and *Cheek by Jowl*: ‘To protect the acting,’” in *Contemporary European Theatre Directors*, eds. Maria M. Delgado and Dan Rebellato (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 146.

<sup>170</sup> Radosavljević, *The Contemporary Ensemble*, 100.

“traditional methods” encapsulates distinct opportunities for collaboration, musical composition and performance, and verse delivery. In these instances, it is not only Hall who functions as teacher, as the actors are often given opportunities to take on leadership roles.

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**“The company assembles, and acts out what is described.”**

While press surrounding the company tends to focus on its all-male status, it is the choric presence that defines a Propeller production. Propeller’s choric presence influences every stage of the production process, from the preparatory work between Hall and Pavelka described in earlier chapters to the first read-through and physically blocking the production. It affects the way rehearsals are scheduled — because there is an expectation the choric presence’s actions will be integrated with the driving action of the narrative, Propeller’s operates on a universal call system that requires every actor to be present at every rehearsal. By seeing the complete formation of the work, the actor is given an intimate knowledge and understanding of the piece as a whole, facilitating his ability to contribute ideas to the production which may be unrelated to his individual performance.<sup>171</sup> The choric presence also helps create clear frameworks that present the performance as the collective effort of both actors and audiences, which leads to new perspectives on Shakespeare’s plays. Performance moments from 2012’s *The Winter’s Tale* and observations from the open rehearsals conducted as part of Propeller’s 2015 symposium on *Edward III* illustrate how Propeller creates its productions in a collaborative environment, encouraged by the performance opportunities offered by the choric presence.

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<sup>171</sup> Chris Myles quoted in Ramon; “Dominic takes the good with the Bard.”

In 1997's *Henry V*, Hall took advantage of the explicit Chorus present in Shakespeare's text and built his production around its speeches, which were divided amongst the company. The Chorus' speeches are highly metatheatrical, spoken directly to the audience and reference not only the theatrical labor of the playwright and performers but also repeatedly emphasize the importance of the audience's imaginative participation:

... 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,  
 Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times,  
 Turning th'accomplishment of many years  
 Into an hourglass [...] <sup>172</sup>

A survey of the chorus' speeches reveals a litany of responsibilities charged to the audience. These responsibilities alternate between permissive ones that allow the narrative to move forward and proactive ones that actively aid the performers by supporting their work through imaginative engagement.<sup>173</sup> Writing generally about theatrical choruses, Helen Eastman observes,

When an actor moves between playing a protagonist and joining the chorus, it can, in the transition, highlight the differing nature of group and individual identity, as the actor subjugates himself to the group. [...] we are deliberately shown the exposed mechanics of the theatrical transition; drawing our attention to the different dramaturgical nature of the individual and the chorus (and the boundaries of both) in this way can become in itself a part of the thematic exploration into communality.<sup>174</sup>

The importance of exposing the transition "in" and "out" of character honors Propeller's pursuit of inclusionary theatre practice by reminding audiences of the

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<sup>172</sup> Hall and Warren, *Propeller Shakespeare: Henry V*, 22.

<sup>173</sup> Throughout the course of the play, spectators are asked by the chorus to "suppose," "piece out," "divide," "make," "think," "admit," "hear," "judge," "play," "behold," "grapple," "leave," "work," "see," "eke out," "entertain," "sit and see," "grant," "place," "omit," and "advance" in support of the story. Ibid., 22, 36, 47-48, 63-64, 92-93.

<sup>174</sup> Helen Eastman, "Chorus in Contemporary British Theatre," in *Choruses, Ancient and Modern*, eds. Joshua Billings, Felix Budelmann, and Fiona Macintosh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 367.

performance process and is consistent across all Propeller productions. By presenting the driving action of the play as the play-acting of a group of soldiers, the Chorus connected the performer and the spectator, providing a framework wherein the named characters are the cumulative result of performative acts rather than autonomous individuals whose speech and action derive from a fully realized internal life.

In the productions that followed *Henry V*, Propeller continued to use the choric presence to contextualize Shakespeare's stories as theatrical exercises which required the audience to support the production through its complicity. Eastman finds that the use of choruses in twentieth-century British theatre tends to focus on the creative process, interacting with the public, or adapting Greek texts.<sup>175</sup> Though there are elements of the first two categories in Propeller's work, its choruses primarily serve as a bracketing system for the driving action, the presence of soldiers, fairies, or prisoners perpetually connecting the actions of the individuals back to their place within larger communities. The use of the chorus to reconstitute the driving action as plays-within-plays — either explicitly, such as in *Henry V*, or implicitly, as in the case of *The Winter's Tale* which envisioned the action as Mamillius' "tale for winter" — introduces the ensuing narratives as recreations, not unlike Brecht's street scene where the communal acknowledgment that the action is representative creates space for analysis by the spectators.<sup>176</sup>

In *The Winter's Tale*, Hall consolidated the choric presence in the character of Mamillius who Hall felt would provide the single perspective by which the worlds of Sicilia and Bohemia would be linked.<sup>177</sup> In the published play text, Mamillius is

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<sup>175</sup> Eastman, 375-376.

<sup>176</sup> Bertolt Brecht, "The Street Scene: A Basic Model for the Epic Theatre," in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. and ed. John Willet (London: Methuen, 1964), 121-129.

<sup>177</sup> Myles, personal interview.

identified as the production's central figure though the opening stage directions:

“*PRINCE MAMILLIUS, wearing pyjamas, enters. He later plays his sister PERDITA, and the personification of TIME. In the first five scenes he is either on stage or watching, increasingly*

*alarmed, from above.*”<sup>178</sup> In the performance's opening moments, Mamillius' isolated

entrance and location downstage center, and the lighting which illuminated him while

simultaneously obscuring the other actors in shadows, clearly presented the character

as a focal point. While the specificity of Mamillius performing the roles of Perdita and

Time was obscured in performance by the prevalence of doubling within the

production, the three characters were nonetheless linked through the physical

presence of Tam Williams (2005) and Ben Allen (2012). Though *The Winter's Tale* is

an unusual example of Propeller's choric presence through its focus on a single,

named character, it still honored the aims of the company's more conventional choric

usage by establishing a context for the story and helped highlight the production's

thematic concerns through significant doubling.

However, the legacy of *Henry V*'s chorus is so ingrained in Propeller's practice

that even when a production forgoes a group choric identity, it nonetheless featured

moments where textual emendation ensured the entire acting company would be

involved in the action onstage. How Hall and Warren approach and edit texts for the

company was closely examined in chapter 2, but it is worth re-emphasizing that, in

addition to these emendations being conceptually driven, they also reflect the practical

needs of the acting company. For *The Winter's Tale*, these emendations included

expanding scenes that, in Shakespeare's text, required a limited number of actors.

The play's first scene was one such instance, identified in Propeller's play text as the

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<sup>178</sup> Edward Hall and Roger Warren, eds., *Propeller Shakespeare: The Winter's Tale* (London: Oberon Books, 2012), 23.



“prologue.”<sup>179</sup> In the Oxford Shakespeare, the opening conversation between Camillo and Archidamus spans forty-six lines and requires only two actors onstage.<sup>180</sup> This expository dialogue establishes Leontes’ and Polixenes’ friendship, the length of Polixenes’ visit to the Sicilian court, and the importance of Mamillius. Instead of beginning with two courtiers, Propeller’s 2012 version reduced the forty-six lines to nine, divided amongst as many “voices.”<sup>181</sup> These “voices” belonged to the Sicilian court, whose members were uniformly dressed in black suits, shirts, and ties that marked them as an anonymous but cohesive group. The division of lines served to involve more of the company in a scene that originally required only two people. It also helped establish the production’s concerns by clearly identifying the key characters and their relationships, and the actors’ different voices isolated each piece of information so as to be easily understood by spectators.

In its structure and narrative importance, this opening exchange is similar to the one which begins act 5, scene 2. Following a scene depicting Leontes’ reception of Florizel and Perdita, act 5, scene 2 was originally structured as a duologue wherein Autolycus serves as the audience’s onstage advocate and questions an anonymous gentleman for details about the royal reunion foreshadowed in the previous scene. Two more gentlemen individually enter as the conversation progresses, exchanging information to corroborate each man’s understanding of what had happened to Leontes’ lost daughter. All in all, the conversation spans 110 lines, structured as small prose speeches interspersed with single line questions. In Propeller’s production, Hall and Warren accommodated the acting company by beginning the scene with a

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> *TWT*, I.i. 1-46.

<sup>181</sup> Hall and Warren, *Propeller Shakespeare: The Winter’s Tale*, 23.

celebratory choric retelling of what has happened formed out of lines from Autolycus and the gentlemen's conversation:

## SCENE TWELVE

*The company assembles, and acts out what is described.*

OLD SHEPHERD	Such a deal of wonder is broken out within this hour
YOUNG SHEPHERD	The ballad makes cannot be able to express it.
POLIXENES	Nothing but bonfires!
LEONTES	Who was most marble changed colour.
CAMILLO	The dignity of this act was worth the audience Of kings and princes.
PAULINA	Some swooned, all sorrowed.
FLORIZEL	There is speech in their dumbness,
PERDITA	Language in their very gestures.
GENTLEMAN 1	They looked as if they had heard of a world ransomed,
GENTLEMAN 2	Or one destroyed. <sup>182</sup>

As each actor entered the stage and spoke his line describing the joy in Sicilia, he took a position upstage so that a line of smaller character groupings was formed from stage right to stage left: the young and old shepherds, the kings and Camillo, Florizel and Perdita, and Paulina. Only after the company had assembled onstage did Autolycus enter from upstage center, crossing downstage to the gentlemen downstage left, and began to question them as to the “relation” he — and the audience — had missed.

While the beginning of the scene saw the most notable changes through the incorporation of additional characters, there were further changes made by Hall and

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 105.

Warren. Nearly half of all of the lines from act 5, scene 2 were cut, the three gentlemen were reduced to two, and most of questions were reassigned to Autolycus, positioning him as the audience's onstage proxy. Moreover, the gentlemen's prose speeches were restructured to give them alternating lines, isolating each pertinent piece of information. This new structure was complemented by the physical movement of the assembled actors: as each gentleman recounted a part of the reunion, the actors upstage moved to create a corresponding tableau of the described event, freezing until the next moment was described. Though the actors onstage corresponded with their named characters, their performances were distinctly non-naturalistic: their poses were exaggerated and each transition was signaled by a piano flourish (played onstage by Gunnar Cauthery). The actors' stilted motions and response to the cues given by the gentlemen connected the named characters back to the dolls Mamillius had played with at the show's opening, turning the actors into life-sized mannequins enacting a story. By physicalizing the reunion scene, Propeller's production offered audiences a clear visual accompaniment to the verbal description found in Shakespeare's text, ensuring that each piece of information was clearly communicated. It also opened up performance opportunities for the actors by expanding the scope of the scene from small conversation amongst individuals to a collaborative exercise in story-telling through the incorporation of a choric presence.<sup>183</sup>

Both of these scenes represent small moments between secondary or minor characters which are nonetheless vital to understanding the events of *The Winter's Tale* and whose physicalization by the acting company provided a useful visual guide for audiences. Sometimes these moments are established through Hall and Warren's

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<sup>183</sup> In the 2012 production, Dugald Bruce-Lockhart (Antigonus) and Richard Dempsey (Hermione) were both absent from this scene.

preparation of Propeller's play texts, but they can also emerge from the rehearsal process through the actors' own experimentation. To facilitate the constant engagement of all actors throughout the entire production, Propeller operates on a universal call system which requires all actors to be present at every rehearsal. According to actor Vince Leigh, this system contributes to ensuring the actors are engaged with the production as a whole:

I've been in other plays where you're sent away for rehearsals of the scenes you're not in. The result is that when you put the play together, you're often puzzled by the choices actors have made in those other scenes: you may even feel you'd have judged your own scenes differently if only you'd known what they were doing. With Propeller, we're all involved, and we're really listening to each other every night.<sup>184</sup>

Leigh identifies both individual and collective benefits to the universal call system. By understanding how his performance interacts with the production as a whole, the actor is confident that his choices are supported by the work of his fellow actors. Meanwhile, this interconnectedness has the reciprocal effect of making the actors more engaged with the work of their peers because they were part of the process from which it was created. Actor Dominic Tighe connected Propeller's collaborative environment to its universal call, saying "We're all in rehearsal all of the time so every decision is as valid as the next; no idea is too stupid."<sup>185</sup> Tighe indicates that the validity of an actors' contribution is assured by his knowledge of the piece as a whole, supporting the view expressed by Leigh that the universal call encourages understanding of the entire production. However, a system that ensures all actors are present to contribute to the rehearsal process is limited unless there also exists a system by which those contributions can be integrated into performance. As has been

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<sup>184</sup> Quoted in Alistair Macauley, "We don't pigeonhole actors," *The Financial Times*, 14 January 2007, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/c1cdaf20-a253-11db-a187-0000779e2340.html#axzz3f7wQykla>, accessed 4 July 2015.

<sup>185</sup> "Dominic takes the good with the Bard."

demonstrated by the scenes described above, the choric presence provides a practical outlet for the actors to stay involved in the entire production.

In many other ways, Propeller's basic rehearsal structure is consistent with other English companies. An actor's schedule for the *Richard III/The Comedy of Errors* tour shows *Richard III* rehearsed for twenty-five days over five weeks, totaling approximately 200 rehearsal hours while *Comedy of Errors* totaled 176 rehearsal hours over five weeks due to the Christmas and New Year's holidays.<sup>186</sup> The standard rehearsal time for a production in England is between 120 and 160 hours over the course of four to six weeks, making Propeller's rehearsal period only slightly longer than this average.<sup>187</sup> Since 2006, each production is rehearsed individually, with the first production of a tour normally opening in the late fall and enjoying a limited, independent run before the company returns to the rehearsal rooms to stage the second production.<sup>188</sup> Both productions then officially open in January of the following year. The production schedule is necessitated by Propeller's working process as the constant experimentation and revision that gradually shapes a production would become confused if applied to two different plays simultaneously.<sup>189</sup>

In addition to defining the rehearsal schedule, the complexity of Propeller's productions leads many actors to memorize their lines before rehearsals begin so as to be fully available to explore the potential for physical story-telling.<sup>190</sup> Actors are mailed the scripts ahead of the first day of rehearsal, and the scripts themselves are unique to

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<sup>186</sup> Based on the rehearsal schedule provided by Tony Bell for the 2010/1 *Richard III/Comedy of Errors* tour, current as of 9 December 2010.

<sup>187</sup> Devising and repertory companies will often have longer rehearsal periods than commercial theatres. Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5; Jane Scott, "Can you ever have too much rehearsal?", *The Guardian*, 30 August 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2011/aug/30/theatre-rehearsal-directors-show>, accessed 9 March 2015; Ian Youngs, "Simon Russell Beale: The art of rehearsing," BBC, 25 June 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-23032469>, accessed 9 March 2015.

<sup>188</sup> For the 2012/3 and 2013/4 tours, directorial duties were divided between Hall and Bruce-Lockhart. This shift in directorial practice is addressed in the conclusion.

<sup>189</sup> Bruce-Lockhart, personal interview.

<sup>190</sup> Asbury, personal interview; Chance, personal interview.

Propeller, printed on single-sided A4 paper according to the edits made by Hall and Warren.<sup>191</sup> This system means that the initial read-through of the play does not constitute an actor's introduction to the text but the beginning of the collaborative process whereby the company discovers "what we're actually going to say, and not just line by line but also as a piece of theatre."<sup>192</sup> Part of this process is practical: though actors arrive cast in their named roles, many small parts will not be assigned until the company begins this textual work. There are twenty-two named parts in *The Winter's Tale* including "gaoler" and "mariner."<sup>193</sup> The character of Archidamus was cut in Propeller's production, leaving twenty-one roles to be distributed amongst the acting company, which consisted of twelve actors in 2005 and fourteen actors in 2012. However, the Folio text also requires lords, gentlemen, officers, ladies, servants, shepherds and shepherdesses, all of which must be either cut from the production or cast from the limited acting pool. During the textual discussion, actors read their named roles and then volunteer when required to cover smaller roles, with the final distribution of these parts worked out in rehearsal. Rehearsal reports show that a number of minor characters in the 2012 production, including Hermione's ladies-in-waiting, the jailer, and the officer, were assigned during the first two days of rehearsal.<sup>194</sup> Hall will also use this time to begin to identify where music will be required, a process which is explored in more depth in the following section. Both small roles and music are performed by the choric presence.

Throughout the read through, everyone is invited to comment on the play, creating meaning while working within the framework pre-established by Hall's

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<sup>191</sup> Myles, personal interview.

<sup>192</sup> Asbury, personal interview.

<sup>193</sup> Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett and William Montgomery, eds., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 1102.

<sup>194</sup> Ellie Randall, "The Winter's Tale: Rehearsal report #1," 12 December 2011, care of Caro McKay; Ellie Randall, "The Winter's Tale: Rehearsal report #2," 13 December 2011, care of Caro McKay.

directorial concept.<sup>195</sup> Practitioners often view the rehearsal process as a fiercely protected space, and rehearsal access to outsiders is often denied, but the open rehearsals which constituted Propeller's *Edward III* symposium offer insight into how these conversations might unfold in rehearsal. After reading the play's opening scene, the actors raised concerns that included practical questions (what are the motivations and context for the scene), anticipated audience requirements, and potential performance options, such as imbuing Richmond's knighting with increased ceremony.<sup>196</sup> All of these points demonstrated a collective effort to shape the story being told, but the conversation also gestured towards Propeller's overall collaborative process. Though Warren was present at this session, and is often present during initial read throughs, his contributions were limited and mostly occurred in response to direct questions asked by the actors regarding textual meaning.<sup>197</sup> Similarly, Hall participated in the conversation, but his is one voice among many, facilitating conversation without providing the actors with pre-determined motivations. Finally, every actor participated in the conversation, regardless of whether or not he had been one of the readers, and commented on aspects of the scene as a whole rather than limiting himself to his own character.

Though there are differences to the structure of the *Edward III* symposium and a standard Propeller rehearsal — actors were not assigned consistent roles for the symposium, all participants had worked with Propeller before, and the presence of observers altered the energy in the room — the conversational patterns support the actors' descriptions of the rehearsal process as an open one that values all contributions. It also gives insight into how the rehearsal room might be seen to

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<sup>195</sup> Asbury, personal interview.

<sup>196</sup> Based on notes taken during *Propelling Edward III: Research in Action* (London: Wimbledon College of Arts) 30 January 2015.

<sup>197</sup> Corroborated by Tony Bell's description of Propeller's rehearsal process. Bell, personal interview.

resemble a classroom, where a central figure guides a discussion designed to reveal meaning in a work of text. R. Keith Sawyer, whose research focuses on creativity and group dynamics, has found that teachers who rely too heavily on a script rather than collaborative discussion are less effective because “the students cannot co-construct their own knowledge,” and recommends an improvisational model where teachers constantly adapt to the needs and contributions of their students.<sup>198</sup> Sawyer’s study emphasizes a sense of ownership similar to the one identified by Hall as a goal of Propeller’s organization and working practices. In the read-through, the open discussion created a space for the actors to reach their own conclusions about how the scene could eventually be staged instead of being led by a pre-determined outcome provided by Hall.

The first read-through establishes the collaborative environment which will characterize the rest of Propeller’s rehearsal process. Propeller’s rehearsal schedule follows the initial text work of the first few days with very rough blocking of movements so as to build a skeleton of the scenes.<sup>199</sup> Immediately, the big-picture intellectual work on the text is translated into physical movements of actors. The immediate transition from textual work to practical physicalization is necessary so as to begin establishing traffic patterns throughout the production: how actors will move in and out of their named characters and which actors are available to move furniture, play an instrument, create a sound effect, or fill-in for one of the smaller, uncast roles. Actors are then able to embellish this skeletal frame. According to Michael Pavelka,

In the rehearsal room [...] everybody has an equal voice. We throw in ideas that are filtered by the company [...] if anybody makes a

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<sup>198</sup> R. K. Sawyer, “Creative Teaching: Collaborative Discussion as Disciplined Improvisation,” *Educational Researcher* 33, no. 2 (2004), 14.

<sup>199</sup> Myles, personal interview.



suggestion, the response is “Right, let’s try it, let’s actually do it physically; put it on its feet.”<sup>200</sup>

Pavelka’s reference to the physicality of Propeller’s approach, and to the testing of an idea by “putting it on its feet,” emphasizes the place of the physical component of acting in making the actors feel included in the creative process.

The process by which a scene is “put on its feet” resembles the framework structure demonstrated by Hall’s directorial concepts and Pavelka’s scenic designs. Hall gives the actors some kind of structure or goal for the scene — for *Edward III*’s opening scene, Hall positioned the actors to create the configuration he hoped would end the scene — and then steps back to let the actors find their way through the scene.<sup>201</sup> This creates each pass through the scene as a structured improvisation that gradually evolves as elements from each subsequent run through are retained, modified, or cut. During this portion of *Edward III*’s open rehearsals, Hall directed from the floor, on his feet and constantly moving amongst the actors as if he were also a performer. Spatially, Hall’s movements positioned him within the company rather than occupying an authoritarian position of observation and judgement.

Furthermore, Hall’s language was couched in vocabulary that sought to shape the scene but still left room for discussion: “shall we try,” “perhaps,” “might,” is there...?,” “do you think...?,” “I feel,” “to me,” “I think,” and “maybe” were all terms used to begin conversations with the actors regarding possible changes in their performances. This language presented modifications as suggestions rather than commands which the actors could then respond to, offering their own thoughts and suggestions. Complementing this form of open dialogue was the consistent participation of all of the actors: throughout each run of *Edward III*’s opening scene,

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<sup>200</sup> Pavelka, “Making the work of Play,” 134.

<sup>201</sup> Tucker, personal interview.

actors who had not been given a role to read remained engaged in the work by providing sound effects or singing. The experimental quality of the scene work meant that at any time someone could suggest a bit of music or physical business that would require the participation of choric characters.

In educational studies, collaborative environments such as those exhibited in Propeller's rehearsal process have been shown to foster creativity, as they "increas[e] the number of ideas, quality of ideas, feelings of stimulation and enjoyment, and originality of expression in creative problem solving."<sup>202</sup> Soliciting a large number of varying perspectives within a classroom offers a wealth of information and possibility that can then be integrated into superior problem solving.<sup>203</sup> Though the classroom and the rehearsal room serve different purposes, they are similarly groups of individuals engaging in creative problem solving under the supervision of a central leader; thus it is reasonable to expect the benefits of a collaborative learning environment would likewise result from an ensemble rehearsal system.<sup>204</sup>

Propeller's chorus strengthens the comparison between the rehearsal room and cooperative learning because it requires the actors to consider their work in the context of the whole production. A focus on collaboration helps prevent the feelings of isolation and inferiority that can be factors of the star-casting system. Actors in lesser roles have their contributions undervalued, when what is needed is a sense of interconnectedness that recognizes success and failure as equally shared by all members of the company.<sup>205</sup> Those who study collaboration in educational

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<sup>202</sup> Roger T. Johnson and David W. Johnson, "An Overview of Cooperative Learning," in *Creativity and Collaborative Learning*, eds. J. Thousand, A. Villa and A. Nevin (Baltimore: Brookes Press, 1994), 40.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.; Ellice A. Forman and Courtney B. Cazden, "Exploring Vygotskian perspectives in education: the cognitive value of peer interaction," in *Culture, Communication, and cognition: Vygotskian perspectives*, ed. James V. Wertsch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 330.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid. Information from this paragraph originally appeared in a paper given at the British Graduate Shakespeare Conference. Emma Poltrack, "'Shakespeare in the iPlayer Era: Revivals and the Creative Ensemble', *The British Graduate Shakespeare Conference* (Stratford-upon-Avon: The Shakespeare Institute, 6 June 2013).

<sup>205</sup> Quarmby, 178.

environments refer to this interconnectedness as “positive interdependence,” a state which parallels Peter Hall’s description of a cast’s relationship. Peter Hall maintains “the most important thing about the theatre is that every actor, however great, is totally dependent on the actors around him, and unless there is a real sharing, a real sense of support, no actor can play as well as he could when he is being supported by his fellows.”<sup>206</sup> This positive interdependence is built from each individual being responsible not only for their own contribution but for ensuring the success of their teammates as well.<sup>207</sup> The “sink or swim together” attitude embodied in educational positive interdependence is found in Propeller’s existence in the public consciousness as an acting company rather than a producing one — promotional materials for Propeller’s shows never list individual actors’ names, attracting audience members through the company’s reputation rather than capitalizing on the fan base of a specific actor.

As well as providing an outlet for creative contribution in the rehearsal room, Propeller’s choric presence also structures certain aspects of the rehearsal to encourage group bonding. Writing generally about choral practice, Eastman observes that “chorus as a rehearsal technique can become invaluable to experimentation and devising, [...] both to allow a group to play together in the rehearsal room within a scene without external instruction, or just to develop a company’s ability to work together and be highly responsive to one another.”<sup>208</sup> Eastman’s use of the word “play” is significant, as it connects her view of the chorus to both Hall’s view as theatre as how we learn and Propeller’s overarching approach to rehearsal that rejects a pre-determined outcome.<sup>209</sup> The *Edward III* symposium offered valuable insight into

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<sup>206</sup> P. Hall, “Chekov, Shakespeare, the Ensemble and the Company,” 207

<sup>207</sup> Johnson and Johnson, 40.

<sup>208</sup> Eastman, 365.

<sup>209</sup> Based on Kaprow’s definition of “play.” Kaprow, 161.

Propeller's blocking process and carried implications for how the choric characters may be integrated into the driving action. However, unlike conventional Propeller rehearsals, Hall and Pavelka had not conceived the choric identity for *Edward III* in anticipation of the workshop, which meant there was not yet a uniform approach to performing the choric characters. Because the nature and function of the choric community changes depending on the choric identity, how the company rehearses their choric character also changes on a production-by-production basis. Ahead of any text work, the cast of *Henry V* was made to go through an army training course to bond the company as a squadron of soldiers, but actors were also encouraged to develop the individual soldiers' identities. In contrast, the fairy chorus for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was "trying to make the fairies as *alike* each other as possible, like a school of fish," while the butchers of *Rose Rage* are described by Myles as functional roles, almost like "stage managers."<sup>210</sup> What is consistent across these examples is that the role of choric characters is created not through dedicated improvisation or training exercises, but through *doing* the work of the play. Therefore, the work of the chorus is developed simultaneously with the driving action of each scene, interacting with, responding to, or observing the interactions of named characters. Even the fairies, which seem to adhere closer to Lecoq's view of the chorus as a unified, leaderless group more than the individualized soldiers, grew out of the practical work of the actors rehearsing their interactions with Puck.<sup>211</sup>

There was one final significant difference between the symposium and Propeller's usual rehearsal process — in normal practice, during the blocking portion of the rehearsal process, the company constantly moves between two rehearsal rooms.

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<sup>210</sup> Myles, personal interview.

<sup>211</sup> Eastman, 364; Myles, personal interview.

At the end of the day, the actors reunite to share their work, allowing actors to maintain contact with the production as a whole. This system ensures that every actor is actively supporting the production, both throughout the rehearsal process and during the performance itself. Hall leads one of these rooms, overseeing the shaping of each individual scene and its driving action, while the other is used for embellishments such as musical performances and is led by the actors on a rotating basis depending on the task. Soundscapes, sound effects and the composition and performance of melodic music within a Propeller production are integrated with the choric presence, offer further opportunities for creative contribution through both the rehearsal process, and within a performance and are another way in which Propeller's productions are able to make connections between Shakespeare's plays and modern audiences.

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### **Musical Composition and Performance**

As with the choric presence, Propeller's use of music is part of the 1997 *Henry V*'s legacy. For that production, Hall cast actors with musical abilities and subsequently found ways of showcasing their talents within the production. Now, Propeller's musical cues result from a combination of Hall identifying requirements during the read-through and opportunities for music evolving organically from Propeller's trial-and-error blocking process. Through this process, Propeller's musical development often expands beyond the requirements specified by Shakespeare's texts. For example, in the Oxford text of *The Winter's Tale*, there are eight cues for music: five songs, two dances, and one musical flourish.<sup>212</sup> Propeller's published text lists twice as many, with

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<sup>212</sup> *TWT*, IV.iii.0.1; IV.iii.123-126; IV.iv.166.4; IV.iv.219-230; IV.iv.295-306; IV.iv.313-321; IV.iv.340.10; V.iii.98.

seven songs and nine musical cues specified.<sup>213</sup> The types of music used by Propeller range in intricacy, from simple underscoring to original songs, but all contribute to Propeller's goals of clarity and inclusivity, enriching Shakespeare's text in performance. All of these types of music help guide the audience through the narrative, encourage spectator engagement, and draw attention to the means by which the actors create a production.

Before addressing the composition and performance of melodic music, I first want to examine Propeller's broader use of sound through a brief consideration of the company's sound effects and soundscapes. By "sound effects" I am referring to isolated instances of noise which are used to comment on the action onstage. These effects can be the result of the "slapsticks, cymbals, cowbells, and woodblocks" used in *The Comedy of Errors* (2011, 2013) to accompany the cartoon violence.<sup>214</sup> In this example, the comedic sounds served to parody the actual one created from a slap or a punch, subsequently rendering the action itself as parodic. In his pamphlet on acting technique, based on his experiences with Propeller, actor Dugald Bruce-Lockhart implicitly references *Comedy's* sound effects when he suggests "amusingly inappropriate percussion" as a way to "maintain the joyful energy" of the exchanges between the Antipholi and the Dromios despite the presence of violence.<sup>215</sup> Here, the sound effects define the tone of the exchange, in turn helping to define the tone of the overall production.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Hall and Warren, *Propeller Shakespeare: The Winter's Tale*, 23-24, 38, 44, 54, 66, 68, 72, 75, 79, 81, 83, 101, 112, 114.

<sup>214</sup> Jon Trenchard, "Music in the Comedy of Errors," *A Midsummer Night's Dream / The Comedy of Errors* program (Coventry: Belgrade Theatre, 2014), np.

<sup>215</sup> Dugald Bruce-Lockhart, *Heavy Pencil: The Truth About Acting* (CreateSpace: Independent Publishing Platform, 2014), 53.

<sup>216</sup> Until 2010, Propeller's sound effects were created onstage by the choric actors as part of the company's commitment to emphasizing the live theatrical event. Sound designer David Gregory joined the company for 2010's *Richard III* to augment the effects created by the actors with recorded sound, but his working process remains true to the original aims of the company. Gregory is present for all rehearsals, tours with the company, and often uses recordings of the actors to supplement the sound effects created onstage. Will Wollen, "Interview with David Gregory - Sound Designer," *Henry V* education pack (Propeller: 2011), 20.

More complicated than sound effects, soundscapes similarly help establish the production's environment and exist separately from the underscoring and songs that are independently composed and rehearsed by the actors. Nonetheless, they must be acknowledged when considering the aural components of a Propeller production. Performed by the choric characters, these soundscapes help locate the shifting locations within the narrative, aurally embellishing Michael Pavelka's sets. They also serve to create a specific atmosphere for a scene. In 2012's *The Winter's Tale*, the eerie soundscape underscoring Leontes' descent into jealous madness was created by the actors passing their fingers along the rims of brandy glasses. The otherworldly sound heightened the production's mood, while the creation of the sound also carried visual significance as Leontes' drinking was clearly indicated as a motivating factor in his response to Hermione's and Polixenes' interactions. The text (Leontes' jealousy), subtext (alcohol exacerbating his jealousy), and performance of the text (actors speaking lines while manipulating the brandy glasses) were all rendered clear through allowing the audience to experience both the process and product of the musical performance.

Both sound effects and soundscapes serve a production by helping to establish a specific atmosphere which is expanded upon by the use of underscoring and songs. In recounting Propeller's origin story, Hall connects music to his goals for the actors — an increased involvement in the creation of the performance — as well as the experience of the audience, who would be treated to musical performances during the production's interval so as to view the production as “an event.”<sup>217</sup> The use of live music is one of the methods the company has established to attempt to recapture

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<sup>217</sup> E. Hall, quoted in “Edward Hall on Propeller's *Henry V* and *The Winter's Tale*.” The musical talents of Propeller's acting company are substantial. Propeller actors include recording artist Johnny Flynn (billed as Joe Flynn for 2007's *The Taming of the Shrew/Twelfth Night*) and singer Dominic Tighe, who temporarily left Propeller to record with the vocal group Blake.

some of the atmosphere of the plays' original performances and is listed by Hall as one of the "traditional" methods he applied to the 1997 *Henry V*.<sup>218</sup> For that first production, Hall set a precedent by casting actors with musical abilities but without any specific intended use for their skills in production. This approach kept the musical possibilities fluid, able to adapt and respond to discoveries of both the rehearsal process and the musical socialization which occurred between the actors while they were located at the Watermill Theatre.<sup>219</sup> Actor Tony Bell describes the process by which *Henry V*'s musical score began to take shape:

The third day, we were all staying in this one big house in the Watermill and I had just done a show where I had learned all this Irish folk music. Just for fun, I started playing Irish folk and another actor, Bob Horwell, he started playing Irish pipes, and then another guy, Matt Flynn, started playing guitar, and Sam Callis started playing guitar. I taught them the songs and that night we were playing this music just for fun and Ed walked past and he said, "We're going to have that in the play. We'll have an interval band." <sup>220</sup>

In the example of *Henry V*, Irish music was used because it was what Bell had recently engaged with during his work on another production. Bell's previous experience with Irish folk music influenced a major artistic decision, yet the contribution was also characterized by the collaboration which occurred as actors joined the jam session and built upon the foundation provided by Bell.

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<sup>218</sup> Edward Hall, "Propeller brings wind of change to theatre," *The Yorkshire Post*, 7 January 2011, <http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/propeller-brings-wind-of-change-to-theatre-1-3030689>, accessed 20 June 2015. The connection between live music and Elizabethan playing practices is one of the pillars of Shakespeare's Globe's OP performances, but live music is also used by non-"traditional" companies such as Kneehigh and Cheek by Jowl as a dramaturgical tool or means of enhancing the theatrical quality of the productions. Claire Van Kampen, "Music and Aural Texture at Shakespeare's Globe," in *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*, eds. Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 80; Duška Radosavljević, "Kneehigh Theatre," in *British Theatre Companies 1995-2014*, ed. Liz Tomlin, vol. 3 of *British Theatre Companies*, eds. John Bull and Graham Saunders (London: Methuen, 2015), 168, 174; Reade, 98.

<sup>219</sup> This is contrast to casting musicians to for a specific, isolated purpose within a show. Sianed Jones is an example of this kind of casting, given the role of Glyndwr in *Henry IV pt. 1* of the RSC's 2007 History Cycle. Her role as "musician" as opposed to actress was emphasized in her classification as part of the music department rather than the acting company in the Appendix to *Exit Pursued by a Badger*, Nick Asbury's account of the production process, and her exclusion from the Histories Cycle program. Coen Heijes, "'Strike up the drum: The use of Music in the Boyd History Cycle,'" *Shakespeare Bulletin* 27, no. 2 (2009), 238; Asbury, *Exit Pursued by a Badger*, 182 - 183; *The Histories* program, 68 - 69.

<sup>220</sup> Bell, personal interview.



Almost twenty years later, the process by which Propeller approaches its musical scores still resembles Bell's anecdotal account of that first production. As described by Hall, musical composition and its incorporation into the production follows a trajectory that is quite similar to the overall rehearsal process. First, a general style of music is decided upon based on the directorial and design concepts, followed by the identification of certain moments where music will be required. These moments begin to provide a roadmap through the production but remain flexible as the rehearsal process progresses. The actors then begin composing, sourcing, and arranging pieces of music that might work within the production, compiling a large collection of possible material. Despite the prevalence of music within a Propeller show, actor Dugald Bruce-Lockhart specifies that musical experience is not a requirement for incoming actors but something that evolves through the act of rehearsing, a view supported by actors James Tucker and Nick Asbury.<sup>221</sup> For his own part, Hall says that "When I cast the Propeller ensemble, I'm obviously looking for good actors, but I'm also looking for people with all sorts of skills: we don't have massive light rigs or hydraulic sets, so the way we tell stories relies on the actors' abilities."<sup>222</sup> These comments show that, though music provides a specific outlet for an actor to contribute to Propeller's story-telling process, actors are not judged based on their particular musical ability so much as they are asked to commit to a process where skills are exchanged amongst members of the company.

Though collaborative, this process is overseen by a music captain who comes from within the acting company, fulfilling the same function as Bell did in *Henry V* by

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<sup>221</sup> Bruce-Lockhart, personal interview; Tucker, personal interview; Nick Asbury, "The Process of Music for Henry V," in *Propeller Shakespeare: Henry V*, ed. Edward Hall and Roger Warren (London: Oberon Books, 2012), 14.

<sup>222</sup> Quoted in Hugh Montgomery, "How we met: Johnny Flynn & Ed Hall," *The Independent*, 31 October 2010, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/how-we-met-johnny-flynn-amp-ed-hall-2117356.html>, accessed 25 June 2015.

teaching the others music which is then expanded on and elaborated throughout the rehearsal process. Actors are able to volunteer to serve as musical director or captain for individual productions, which gives them an opportunity to take on a leadership role and actively increase their investment in the work being done. The music captain is also responsible for composing particular pieces of underscoring or songs for a production. Underscoring introduces musical themes that help guide the audience through Shakespeare's stories and can relate to a single character or can signal larger tonal shifts related to time and place. For his debut tour with Propeller, actor Gunnar Cauthery composed a major musical motif known as the "music box theme" for 2012's *The Winter's Tale*.<sup>223</sup> The tune consisted of a short climbing phrase that then gradually receded, possessing the light, tinkling quality of the music box from which it gets its name. Associated with Mamillius in the production's prologue, the theme was repeated throughout the production to chart Leontes' progression and "sharpen the poignancy of the narrative loose end created by Mamillius' loss."<sup>224</sup>

The repetition of the theme throughout the production is an example of music being used to create instances of "ghosting," Marvin Carlson's term for when audiences are repeatedly confronted with a single "artistic product" in a number of different contexts.<sup>225</sup> It is Hall's intention that such a repetition, especially in cases of an association between character and a "signature tune," is subliminally recognized by the audience.<sup>226</sup> In the prologue, the theme was performed by Cauthery on a piano as Mamillius sat surrounded by the mannequins onstage. Though Cauthery was present onstage, he was obscured in shadows and the focus of the moment was on Mamillius

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<sup>223</sup> Gunnar Cauthery, "Music in *The Winter's Tale*," in *Propeller Shakespeare: The Winter's Tale*, eds. Edward Hall and Roger Warren (London: Oberon Books, 2012), 16.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 7.

<sup>226</sup> UMSVideos, "Ed Hall on How Propeller Creates Music," YouTube.com, 31 March 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yd2hztE8JS0>, accessed 25 June 2015.

which created a strong connection between the character and the melody. After the initial choric speech identifying the major characters, the gentle tinkling sounds of the theme transitioned into a “jazzy” variation as part of the party Leontes was hosting for Polixenes. Later, the theme was repeated as the action shifted to Mamillius’ nursery, but this second rendition was softer and more faltering than the first and was quickly replaced within the scene by the high-pitched tones of the brandy glasses — an aural analogy for Leontes’ jealousy taking over the cozy domestic world within the Sicilian palace.<sup>227</sup> For its final performance, in Paulina’s chapel, the piano was still present but moved to upstage left and, as in the prologue, Cauthery played in shadows. His initial response to Paulina’s charge to “Strike, music!” was a measured tune of repeated notes that seem to mark the passage of time rather than create a recognizable melody but, as Hermione and Leontes embraced, traces of the music box theme began to emerge. Cauthery’s playing quickly returned to the gentle measured notes he had begun with, finally returning to the theme when the court exited and left Leontes and Mamillius onstage. In each iteration, the music box recalled the production’s opening moments and its initial association with Mamillius as it simultaneously drew attention to the changing contexts in which the character was seen: a boy at play, a witness to his father’s cruelty (Leontes physically attacked the heavily pregnant Hermione during the nursery scene), and, finally, the ghostly remembrance of a lost child.

As with the soundscapes, the method of musical production was important to how music functioned in *The Winter’s Tale*. The relationship between Cauthery at the piano and the narrative frame of the production was constantly being redefined. His black suit identified him as part of the courtier-chorus that recited the opening

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<sup>227</sup> Cauthery, 16-17.

prologue, which cast Cauthery's initial playing of the theme as non-diegetic performance, part of the scene setting that was the work of the theatrical production. As the scene transitioned into the party, Cauthery remained at the piano but the music became diegetically linked to the characters who began singing along to the song as part of the raucous celebration. Later, as Leontes began to question Hermione's relationship with Polixenes, he watched the two of them at the piano where Polixenes carefully taught Hermione the melody. For the nursery scene, the source of the music was obscured, once again returning it to the exterior of the play's fictional framework. The final scene showed a reverse of the transition that occurred in the production's opening moments. Paulina's call for music in the text initially acknowledged music's presence within the chapel, and audiences were not only made aware of the process of creating the production's musical score but were also united with the performers through sharing the aural experience. However, Cauthery's identity within the scene became increasingly unstable as the scene continued and none of the characters onstage acknowledged his presence. Though both characters and spectators were able to hear the music, it appeared that only the spectators were able to see its source, once again placing Cauthery and the piano beyond the frame of the driving action. This constant fluctuation in his status within *The Winter's Tale* is not dissimilar to David Lindley's description of the musicians in David Farr's 2009/10 RSC production of the same, where Autolycus was joined by an acknowledged onstage band that then proceeded to provide non-diegetic underscoring. Lindley criticized the unstable identities of the musicians in that production as "disconcerting."<sup>228</sup> However, in Propeller's production, the instability was part of a larger, non-illusionistic performance aesthetic. Rather than create a realistic onstage world, the music helped

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<sup>228</sup> David Lindley, "'Sounds and Sweet Airs': Music in Shakespearian Performance History," *Shakespeare Survey* 64 (2011), 72.

draw attention to the production as a work of imaginative fiction that invited audiences to consistently adjust their perspectives according to the needs of the story.

Cauthery's composition and performance of the music box theme has thus far led to a disproportionate emphasis on his role in creating *The Winter's Tale's* musical score. Though his musical contribution to the production was significant, it was not done in isolation. Cauthery himself asserts that *The Winter's Tale's* music was largely shaped by the acting company as a whole by tailoring the music for specific talents, members of the company volunteering to learn new instruments, or from group explorations of musical possibilities.<sup>229</sup> Asbury similarly described the process for *Henry V's* music as communal, beginning with the company learning "songs as a group — all of us standing around the piano, and taking various folk songs that we knew and playing with them — seeing whose voice sat where, who could accompany, etc."<sup>230</sup> In both of these descriptions, the music is guided by the interests and knowledge of the group. Asbury identifies this collaborative working practice as crucial to the actors' investment in the material:

Actors are extraordinarily adaptable creatures and will learn things very quickly, but to me, there is no point in imposing a piece of music or dance upon a group when most of them are intimidated and don't think they can do it. They won't enjoy what they're doing, it is alien to them, and they won't sing it very well. If it comes from the group, and we find it together, then the whole group can invest in it, find our joy in it, and therefore communicate what we need to do all the better.<sup>231</sup>

The music is responding to what is happening in the room, which contrasts with other rehearsal practices where the composer exists outside of the rehearsal, either imposing his or her music onto the process or constantly having to adjust to changes in the

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<sup>229</sup> Cauthery, 16.

<sup>230</sup> Asbury, "The Process of Music for Henry V," 14.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

rehearsal room for which they are not present.<sup>232</sup> What sets Propeller's process apart from others is that the composer is not only observing the acting company as they rehearse but is, in fact, part of the acting company itself. The compositions are not assigned to the actors but shared communally amongst them.<sup>233</sup>

The *Edward III* symposium offered a glimpse into the collaborative process that shapes the musical components in a Propeller production. For the symposium, actor Dominic Gerrard served as honorary music captain, teaching the assembled actors a short song he had composed based on 13th century rounds. After briefly practicing the song, which actor Robert Hands volunteered to begin, it was incorporated into the scene and the actors began performing it as part of their blocking. As they ran through the scene, other actors and Hall began to suggest modifications, including adding a phrase repetition and playing with the strength of delivery. As each run of the scene builds upon the previous work, the music gradually moves farther away from what was initially taught to the actors, and its authorship becomes dispersed amongst the group. Thus the editorial, rather than dictatorial, leadership style of Hall and Pavelka was recreated in the ways the actors lead themselves in musical composition, with Gerrard providing a modifiable framework.

In the example of *Edward III*, the music took the form of a choral song performed by the entire company. Whereas instrumental music is an opportunity for individual actors to contribute to the production through composition or

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<sup>232</sup> Adem Ilhan describes how he wrote the music for the RSC's 2012 *Twelfth Night* according to his own musical style. Learning who would play Feste and actually perform the music in the production was described by Ilhan as the "final" piece of the process, and necessitated Ilhan "teach [the actor] how to be a sort-of 'me'." Gay McAuley provides another example in her account of rehearsals for 2007's *Toy Symphony*, where composer Paul Charlier constantly re-wrote music according to what went on in the rehearsal room but "worked in his own studio and visited the rehearsal room from time to time," implying the re-writes were separate iterations of the music rather than a gradual evolution. Adem Ilhan, "Making Feste's Songs," *Twelfth Night* program, Royal Shakespeare Company. Royal Shakespeare Theatre: Summer 2012, np.; McAuley, 112, 131.

<sup>233</sup> In Mike Brewer and Liz Garnett's article on creating consensus in communal singing, they caution choir directors to position themselves *within* the performance ensemble so as to consider the impact of their actions on the performers. Mike Brewer and Liz Garnett, "The making of choir: individuality and consensus in choral singing," in *The Cambridge Companion to Choral Music*, ed. André de Quadros (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 256.

performance, ensemble singing is expected of the entire company and helps promote group cohesion. Actor Jon Trenchard, who served as music captain on productions from 2007 to 2011, sees singing as a method by which the company balances

Propeller's individual and collective needs:

When you're singing together, and every single member of the company is singing, *everybody* has to listen and, in listening, you give. You allow other people to sound the way they sound. [...] It's a different dynamic when people are playing instruments because there are some people who are really good, some people who want to show off, and some people who aren't very good at a particular instrument but are really enthusiastic, and other people who really don't want to do any music at all. It becomes less of an ensemble, I think, when people are playing instruments, but the singing really, really helps to unite everyone.<sup>234</sup>

Though the process of deciding on the music and arranging it is done communally, Trenchard recognizes that the performance of said music has the potential to stratify a group through revealed disparities in talent, attitude, or interest. Ensemble singing counters this stratification because the aim is to combine all voices, regardless of talent or experience, into a coherent whole.

Songs also offer an additional method of communicating to and connecting with modern audiences through Shakespeare's texts as they build on the audience's cultural knowledge to inform moments within the narrative action. Kendra Preston Leonard finds that

the approach of using music known to the audience regardless of origin, genre, or style, such as classic rock or pop, is a tactic better suited to knowledgeable audiences or aficionados, who are perhaps attracted to more historically-informed productions. In these productions, the use of songs with lyrics that can be heard as references to the play, or music that is redolent of a play's setting [...] rewards experienced audiences who appreciate the ten clever connections between the play and the music.<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Trenchard, personal interview.

<sup>235</sup> Kendra Preston Leonard, "Hearing the Scene: Approaches to Live Music in Modern Shakespearean Productions," *Early Modern Studies Journal* 5 (2013), 23.

Leonard identifies one advantage of using specific pieces of familiar music as the ability to enrich the experiences of spectators who are able to recognize those connections. However, her description of the process only acknowledges the benefit for those members of the audience who are familiar with both the story and the song. Spectators coming to the story for the first time, but to whom the piece of music is known, are equally able to derive meaning from the juxtaposition by using the music as a key to decipher meaning within a production. In *The Winter's Tale*, the original compositions which marked the Sicilian half were joined in the Bohemian half by covers and *contrafacta*.

Almost all of the music in Bohemia originated with the character of Autolycus (Tony Bell), who is established in Shakespeare's text as the most musical character in the play — he enters *The Winter's Tale* singing and half of the Folio's musical cues belong to him. Autolycus' appearance at the sheep-shearing feast and his attempts to sell to its participants a number of ballads (represented in Propeller's production by compact discs) provided the context for one of the most notable musical performances in Propeller's production history. The ballad which inspired the performance was described by Autolycus as "a passing merry one, and goes to the Tune of 'Two Maids Wooing a Man'. There's scarce a maid westward but she sings it."<sup>236</sup> In Propeller's production, Dorcas (Richard Dempsey) and Mopsa (Gunnar Cauthery) enthusiastically seized upon it, readied themselves for performance of the song, and subsequently began singing the words to the melody of Beyoncé's "Single Ladies." The immediately recognizable tune carried with it connotations of a man taking his relationship for granted, which was then grafted unto Shakespeare's song about a

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<sup>236</sup> Hall and Warren, *Propeller Shakespeare: The Winter's Tale*, 83.



man's reluctance to communicate his intentions to two women. The use of recognizable music within a Shakespeare production honors Autolycus' description of the ballad as an instance of *contrafacta* ("and goes to the tune..") and traces back to the plays' original performance conditions, where many of the songs written out in the plays' texts were set to popular melodies.<sup>237</sup> It also is an instance where a range of meanings can be identified by spectators depending on their familiarity with Shakespeare's text, the Beyoncé song, or both. The combination of the words and the melody of "Single Ladies" retroactively confirms Autolycus' claim that "there's scarce a maid westward but she sings it," and makes the service of selling music more readily understandable to modern audiences, visually supported by his distribution of compact discs. Besides providing a gorgeously comic moment in the Bohemian sheep-shearing festival, the combination of Shakespeare's words and Beyoncé's melody inform both songs: if the man of the song does not change, the women may very well be "Single Ladies" before long.

In addition to *The Winter's Tale's* melodic piano music, 16th century sonnets, and Beyoncé, spectators would have also seen Autolycus perform a raucous rock rendition of "When Daffodils Begin to Peer" and heard the chorus of Donna Summer's "I Feel Love," sung as Perdita and Florizel ran offstage to enjoy the festival. This list of eclectic musical references shows a large variety of sources used for a single production, each one relating to the moment in which it is performed without necessarily creating a unified soundtrack throughout the production. As musical material is compiled by the company, it is listed on one of the walls of the rehearsal room so that Hall and the actors can refer to it and place it accordingly, carrying out what Hall refers to as a "cut and paste job" as the pieces are incorporated into the

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<sup>237</sup> David Lindley, "Music, Authenticity and Audience," in *Shakespeare's Globe: A Theatrical Experiment*, eds. Christie Carson and Farah Karim-Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 96.

production.<sup>238</sup> Lindley finds that “the requirement of internal coherence in musical and visual types [...] is deeply embedded in most people’s attitude to incidental music.”<sup>239</sup> However, Propeller’s coherence is achieved through music’s relationship with the story and its onstage performance rather than its genre, cultural origin, or time period. As described by Asbury, the many different styles of music are “united” by “thirteen male actors performing it together to create an effect: to communicate something to the audience at a particular time.”<sup>240</sup> Whereas Lindley observes a trend in Shakespearean performance to create music that is absorbed into the production, Propeller’s music is chosen so as to play an active part in communicating elements of Shakespeare’s texts by discernibly commenting on the action.

This commentary is not limited to the presentational world but also occurs in the scene changes that are required by the theatrical process. According to Trenchard, the use of music during these changes is a method by which the practical work of transitioning the stage from one scene to the next becomes integrated into the main narrative action. The addition of music allows the “work” of theatre to be combined with the “play” of performance, deepening the meaning communicated to audiences:

As a result of the fact that you’re using music to cover up the scene change, you’re also injecting something into the drama at those moments. For example, Shakespeare gives Richard a triumphant speech in *Richard III*, after he woos Lady Anne, and the music can give the audience the same feeling of jollity which is in Richard. We used “Now is the month of May.”<sup>241</sup>

Though the actor is responsible for creating his character, interpreting Shakespeare’s words to communicate their effects on the character’s emotional state, the music serves to expand that expression so that the audience actually experiences that emotional

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<sup>238</sup> UMSVideos. According to Leonard, the American Shakespeare Center uses a similar process whereby actors compile a list of possible songs for performance on a whiteboard in the rehearsal rooms. Leonard, 30-31.

<sup>239</sup> Lindley, “Sound and Sweet Airs,” 61.

<sup>240</sup> Asbury, “The Process of Music for Henry V,” 14.

<sup>241</sup> Trenchard, personal interview,

state for itself. The tune Trenchard refers to is a sixteenth century ballad whose climbing phrases and short, percussive lyrics are both happy and triumphant. Spectators responding to these emotions triggered in the music are momentarily aligned with Richard, no longer able to condemn his actions but rather celebrating with him and implicitly approving of his actions immediately before those actions turn to relentless violence — the following scene shows the rapid decline of King Edward's health (in Propeller's version, poisoned by Richard) and Richard hiring the murderers to kill his brother, Clarence.

The final category of music I wish to discuss is another form of extra-textual song and similarly exists in a liminal space between “performance” and “reality”: interval music. Not every Propeller production will include an interval performance — *The Winter's Tale*, for example, did not, nor did 2008's *The Merchant of Venice* — and there are no set criteria for which productions will be granted one and which will not. In instances where an interval performance does occur, however, it is a method of sustaining the performance. Abigail Rokison quotes Bell describing the benefits from interval music as eradicating the separation between performer and spectator, increasing the spontaneity of performance, and “whip[ping] them [the audience] up into an entertained frenzy so that when they hit the second half they are ready to continue to be entertained.”<sup>242</sup> Rokison identifies these goals as “in keeping with the spirit of Elizabethan amphitheaters,” referring to Hall's interest in using interval music to preserve a production's atmosphere.<sup>243</sup> Trenchard similarly describes it as

a way of building energy. One of the really interesting things with *The Comedy of Errors* was the fact that there were certain venues that didn't let us do interval music and you were always aware that the audience wasn't as buoyant when you came back in at the top of the show in

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<sup>242</sup> Rokison, “Authenticity in the twenty-first century,” 80.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

those instances. But if you'd done the interval music, then everyone who could hear and was engaging in the music during the interval would come back with a kind of lighter, more energetic spirit, which is exactly what we needed in order to propel them into Act Two, which is really fast. It served the function of actually leading the audience in a kind of energetic capacity.<sup>244</sup>

The interval is usually considered a break for performer and spectator alike, an “off” period where both groups can disengage from the performance.<sup>245</sup> The interval music prevents this disengagement by resisting such a separation between “on” and “off” — just as music served to fill the recreational periods during Propeller’s early days rehearsing at the Watermill, weakening the distinction between what was the actors at work and at play, its role in performance is to create the theatrical experience as an entertainment, an event, and a shared experience of play.

These performances consist of well-known, popular songs which bear some relation to the production, and the spectators are encouraged to participate through singing or clapping along. For the 2011 *Henry V*, the entire company (save Dugald Bruce-Lockhart, whose performance of Henry was characterized as a memorial reconstruction and did not enter the spectator space during the production) performed three high energy songs: “I’ll Tell Me Ma,” “The John B. Sails,” and “The Wild Rover.” All three contain lyrics that reference a future homecoming (“I’ll tell me Ma when I get home...;” “I feel so broke up, I want to go home;” “I’ll confess to my mother....”) which indirectly commented on the displacement of men at war.<sup>246</sup> Each song also was structured around a repetitive chorus that could quickly be learned by spectators, regardless of their previous knowledge of the lyrics, to facilitate a

<sup>244</sup> Trenchard, personal interview.

<sup>245</sup> McAuley’s backstage account of a performance of *Toy Symphony* includes the observation that “All the actors come to the kitchen for a tea break during the interval,” which is strongly reminiscent of the tea breaks given to actors during the rehearsal process were defined periods when work was momentarily halted. McAuley, 147, 64.

<sup>246</sup> All three songs are folk songs without known authorship but can be found on the Roud Folk Song Index: “I’ll Tell Me Ma” (2649); “The John B. Sails” (15634); “The Wild Rover” (1173). For video reference to the lyrics mentioned, see Shu Liu. “Propeller-HENRY V-interval-Shanghai Lyceum Theatre,” YouTube.com. 18 June 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5xKU9H5Mqw>. Accessed 25 June 2015.

communal sing-a-long. Peter Kirwan reviewed the production after seeing it in Coventry and commented specifically on the community spirit created by “a good hundred audience members, gathered in a cramped foyer space” which fed back into *Henry V*’s production concept of brotherhood in battle.<sup>247</sup> Regardless of whether the production in question demonstrates a thematic concern with community, these interval performances define the theatergoing experience as a social event. Stephen Purcell defines Propeller’s interval music as the company’s “most successful subversion of conventional space,” creating a “shared experience” which helped to preserve some of the intimacy lost by transferring productions from the Watermill to larger theatres.<sup>248</sup>

Propeller’s use of music is a microcosm of the company’s working practices and performance aims. Evolving from music’s organic integration in 1997’s *Henry V*, it functions within the rehearsal process as a binding agent that still affords individual leadership and performance opportunities. The collaborative editing and selection process leads to an eclectic mix of sources and genres that help guide audiences through the performance narratives. Some of this music carries with it cultural associations which inform how spectators are able to read the onstage action, whereas others musical components are repeated to track changes in character or establish tone. In all of its guises, music helps to connect the actors to the production and communicate meaning to audiences, even going so far as encouraging their active participation through communal sing-a-longs during the interval. Propeller’s live performance of music helps unite disparate musical styles, a practice which is echoed in the actors’ approach to Shakespearean verse delivery. Though the acting company

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<sup>247</sup> Peter Kirwan, “Henry V (Propeller) @ The Belgrade Theatre, Coventry,” *The Bardathon*, 7 May 2012, [http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/pkirwan/entry/henry\\_v\\_propeller/](http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/pkirwan/entry/henry_v_propeller/), accessed 3 June 2015.

<sup>248</sup> Purcell, 186.

represents a variety of training and theatrical backgrounds, Hall's use of Shakespearean verse speaking rules acts as a uniting force which nonetheless still leaves ample opportunity for experimentation and audience engagement.

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### Shakespeare's Verse

If Hall and Pavelka's frameworks provide the exoskeleton of a Propeller production, then the delivery of Shakespeare's text by the actors functions as the production's spine. Character, situation, and plot are all clarified through visual and physical clues, but these clues derive their origins from Shakespeare's words. Propeller's layered performance text threatens to crumble if the actors are not able to make audiences understand the meaning carried by the words, devolving into a series of unconnected vignettes. To prevent this, the company adopts a "rigorous approach to text," which, when combined with Edward Hall's self-identification as an "iambic fundamentalist" gestures towards a strict adherence to the rules of Shakespearean verse speaking as established by practitioners such as John Barton, Cecily Berry, and Peter Hall.<sup>249</sup> However, such an approach would initially seem to run counter to Propeller's collaborative aims. A close examination of Propeller in performance demonstrates that though the principles of Shakespearean verse speaking form the foundation for Propeller's performance practice, actors are allowed to experiment when creating their individual performances. This examination reveals that preserving the clarity of Shakespeare's stories takes precedence over adhering to a prescriptive set of rules regarding verse delivery.

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<sup>249</sup> The label of "iambic fundamentalist" was first applied to and subsequently adopted by Peter Hall to describe the director's prescriptive approach. Edward Hall used it to describe himself in his opening remarks to the *Edward III* Performance in Action symposium on January 30, 2015. Peter Hall, *Shakespeare's Advice to the Players* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2003), 209; *Propelling Edward III*.

An exploration of Propeller's adherence to Shakespearean verse-speaking rules necessitates defining what these rules are understood to be. Though published guides vary in their approach to codify the best approach to Shakespeare's verse, the common theme is the importance of preserving the verse's structure and rhythm.<sup>250</sup> This rhythm is most often iambic pentameter (five feet of unstressed-stressed syllable pairings) and the actor is encouraged to breathe only at the end of a line of verse. Hall's view coincides with these theories, as he cites "the full-stops, the stresses in the five-beat line, where the half-lines happen, where the end of the thought happens, the length of the thought" as the "basic set of rules" he expects his actors to adopt.<sup>251</sup>

The importance of phrasing lines according to the verse rhythm also affects how short lines, or lines which do not create a full line of pentameter, are considered in performance. Here, too, Hall reflects common practice by encouraging actors to view pairs of short lines divided between multiple speakers as a single line of verse, necessitating rapid cue pick-up to preserve the rhythm of the line.<sup>252</sup> Propeller's published play texts reinforce this practice by indenting the second speaker's line in such instances. Rokison points to this practice as a troubling embodiment of verse-speaking doctrines, as instances where there are three consecutive short lines printed in a script often reflects the editor's, rather than an actor's, choice as how best to link them.<sup>253</sup> Rokison's observation is part of larger argument against adopting verse-

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<sup>250</sup> John Barton says that "Blank verse is [...] perhaps the most important thing in Shakespeare that an actor has to come to terms with" and Cicely Berry identifies the metro as the "cornerstone" to speaking Shakespeare's text. Peter Hall refers to the "sanctity of the line" and asserts that "Any interpretation which breaks the line, unnecessarily distorts the iambic rhythm, ignores the antithesis, neglects the assonance, evades the alliteration or nine times out of ten does not lean on the end of the line [...] will ruin the communication with the audience and what the actor is supposed to tell them by speaking the text." John Barton, *Playing Shakespeare* (London: Methuen Drama, 1984), 25; Cicely Berry, *The Actor and His Text* (London: HARRAP Ltd., 1987), 52; Peter Hall, *Shakespeare's Advice to the Players*, (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2003), 24, 27; Abigail Rokison surveys different approaches to verse-speaking and their dissemination via published works in her books, *Shakespearean Verse Speaking: Text and Theatre Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 8 - 36.

<sup>251</sup> Tom Fitzsimons, "Making the Bard lucid again," *The Dominion Post*, 29 February 2012, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/entertainment/arts/6501091/The-Winters-Tale-High-tragedy-and-comedy>, accessed 27 April 2015.

<sup>252</sup> Personal observations from *Propelling Edward III*.

<sup>253</sup> Rokison, *Shakespearean Verse Speaking*, 17 - 18, 56.

speaking rules as dogma which demonstrates how the introduction of these rules and their perceived dictation of characterization can be limiting if the director restricts the actors' freedom of interpretation.<sup>254</sup>

But to ignore the rules of verse completely carries its own dangers. In *Popular Shakespeare*, Stephen Purcell points to the “trick” of “imposing contemporary speech patterns upon the verse, mimicking the cadences of naturalistic dialogue” as an approach used to modernize early modern text.<sup>255</sup> Attempts to modernize early modern texts could seem to be in keeping with Propeller's production goals. However, Purcell argues that such delivery achieves the “counterproductive effect of making the poetry more difficult to understand.”<sup>256</sup> Furthermore, naturalistic delivery affects the way information is received by the audience. According to Peter Hall, sacrificing Shakespeare's verse structure to sound modern result in actors

[c]hopping up lines into little naturalistic gobbets [...] by chopping it up, the actors begin to communicate in irregular phrases rather than in the full iambic line. Consequently the actor becomes slower than the audience. The sanctity of the line is betrayed and Shakespeare's primary means of giving out information rapidly and holding our attention is destroyed.<sup>257</sup>

Terry Hands similarly found a connection between phrasing and pacing, citing preoccupation with the “word” over the “phrase” as slowing down RSC productions in the 1970s.<sup>258</sup> Striking a balance between following prescriptive guideline and developing an individual performance has led practitioners, Edward Hall included, to compare Shakespearean verse-speaking to jazz, where a technical skill in recognizing

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>255</sup> Purcell, 44.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> P. Hall, *Shakespeare's Advice to the Players*, 24. The preservation of speed is borne out by Propeller's productions, which routinely have running times of two and three-quarters hours or less. *Richard III* is the exception, lasting just over three hours with a twenty minute interval.

<sup>258</sup> Phillip Breen, “Terry Hands,” in *Routledge Companion to Director's Shakespeare*, ed. John Russell Brown (London: Routledge, 2008), 167.



rhythm and patterns forms a foundation for the actor to then build off of and with which he can improvise.<sup>259</sup>

In Propeller's rehearsal process, these rules are addressed by Hall during the initial read-through as part of the over-arching discussion with the actors of what is happening within the lines. Afterwards, responsibility for adhering to the rules is largely taken on by the individual, something actor Chris Myles refers to as a "self-regulating" impulse that causes the actor to "feel" when something is off in his textual delivery.<sup>260</sup> Hall will continue to highlight instances where honoring the verse-structure or stressing certain words will aid in performance clarity, but there is no sense from Propeller's actors that deviations from the rules are forbidden. Actor Joseph Chance sees the emphasis on line-endings as an "articulated spine" throughout the process rather than "a prescription for how to do Shakespeare."<sup>261</sup> While Propeller actors often acknowledge the "rules" in interviews, they just as often refer to how, once learned, these rules can be broken.<sup>262</sup>

Hall also welcomes experimentation with the use of half-lines, another instance where actors are able to shape the performance through discussion and negotiation. In the Warren-prepared script handed out as part of the *Edward III* symposium, a number of half lines were indented to indicate which ones should be considered a single line of verse, including this selection from scene three:

Lodowick:     'More fair and chaste than is the queen of shades,  
                    More bold in constancy —

King:           In constancy than who?

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<sup>259</sup> P. Hall, *Shakespeare's Advice to the Players*, 26; Dunn; Andrew Dickson, "How Shakespeare in Love's director taught me to talk like Juliet," *The Guardian*, 22 July 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/jul/22/how-to-talk-like-shakespeare-blank-verse>, accessed 7 July 2015.

<sup>260</sup> Myles, personal interview.

<sup>261</sup> Chance, personal interview.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.; Bell, personal interview; Trenchard, personal interview; Dunn.

Lodowick:

‘Than Judith was.’

- *Edward III*<sup>263</sup>

Here, Warren has favored the second paring of lines, possibly led by the fact that linking the first two lines results in line of hexameter. The printing suggests the actor playing Lodowick should quickly complete King Edward’s line as well as indicates a pause after his first line. In the symposium, the actors experimented with this combination and proposed a number of justifications as to why Lodowick might pause. During this conversation, another suggestion was raised when an actor recommended that Lodowick’s two lines should be considered as one with the King making an unrecognized interruption. This contribution demonstrates an attitude that takes Warren’s script as suggestive rather than prescriptive. When asked, Hall confirmed that different pairings are often tried in the rehearsal room and that the script’s printing is only one possible solution.

According to Trenchard, the guiding principle in the rehearsal room is not whether an actor is breathing according to the verse structure but how clearly the sense of his lines will be communicated in performance. This investment in clarity was evident in how Hall worked with the actors during the read-throughs in the *Edward III* symposium, allowing them to read without pre-emptive instructions regarding delivery. As the actors went through the opening scene, Hall identified certain words which would benefit from emphasis: “Native” to identify Artois as French, “sister” to establish the relationship between King Edward and the French royal line (“But was my mother sister unto those?”), and the pairing of “tyrant” and “shepherd” to draw contrast between John of Valois and King Edward. In each case where Hall

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<sup>263</sup> Roger Warren, *Edward III* sample script, provided as part of *Propelling Edward III: Research in Action* (London: Wimbledon College of Arts. 30 January 2015), np.

interrupted to ask for emphasis, it derived from an opportunity to more clearly communicate meaning rather than a desire to dictate performance choices or actor interpretations according to how the rules might dictate delivery. The need for clarity is constantly re-emphasized throughout the rehearsal process and a “radio play” exercise, where the actors perform the lines without any of the blocking, may be used at various points in the rehearsal process to ensure the words remain central to the work of the rehearsal room.

To illustrate how a Propeller actor might strike a balance between employing verse rules and his own individual delivery of Shakespeare’s text, I have chosen to examine Leontes’ speech from act 1, scene 2 of *The Winter’s Tale* wherein he begins to process the sudden jealousy that has taken hold of him:

*Exeunt Polixenes and Hermione*

Gone already.

Inch-thick, knee-deep, o’er head and ears a forked one!  
 Go play, boy, play; thy mother plays, and I  
 Play too; but so disgraced a part, whose issue  
 Will hiss me to my grave. Contempt and clamour  
 Will be my knell. Go play, boy, play. There have been  
 Or I am much deceived, cuckolds ere now,  
 And many a man there is, even at this present,  
 Now, while I speak this, holds his wife by th’arm,  
 That little thinks she has been sluiced in’s absence,  
 And his pond fished by his next neighbor, by  
 Sir Smile, his neighbor. Nay, there’s comfort in’t,  
 Whiles other men have gates, and those gates opened,  
 As mine, against their will. Should all despair  
 That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind  
 Would hang themselves. Physic for’t there’s none.  
 It is a bawdy planet, that will strike  
 Where ’tis predominant; and ’tis powerful. Think it:  
 From east, west, north, and south, be it concluded,  
 No barricado for a belly. Know’t,  
 It will let in and out the enemy  
 With bag and baggage. Many thousand on’s

Have the disease and feel't not. How now, boy?<sup>264</sup>

Unlike Shakespeare's earlier work, *The Winter's Tale* is highly irregular in its verse structure. Over half of Leontes' lines end on an unstressed syllable — known as a feminine ending — and therefore do not create the steady rhythm of iambic's unstressed-stressed syllable pattern.<sup>265</sup> Moreover, the lines frequently run into each other, putting the grammatical and metrical phrasing in conflict with one another and requiring the actor to choose which pattern to prioritize. The phrasing is complex, but the meaning in the speech is crucial to the unfolding story. This speech marks the transition from Leontes' first dawning suspicions to his utter certainty regarding his wife's infidelity and precedes his order that Camillo kill Polixenes.

Robert Hands' performance of Leontes in Propeller's 2012 *The Winter's Tale* illustrates how a flexible approach to the rules impacts performance. The following performance analysis is based on a performance given at the Everyman Theatre in Cheltenham, the first stop of *The Winter's Tale*'s tour. However, no performance can be perfectly replicated. In fact, Propeller's actors are actively encouraged to constantly evolve their performances throughout a tour. As a result, a recording made from the Royal Theatre in Newcastle three months later reveals that, though Hands retained the phrasing and blocking outlined here, his delivery altered and the lines were delivered with increased volume and strength, altering the emotional arc of the speech. The performance described below therefore serves as an example of the type of performance Propeller is able to achieve through the company's approach to Shakespeare verse rules, and should not be thought of as a constant fixture of Propeller's *The Winter's Tale* in production.

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<sup>264</sup> I have reproduced the speech here according to the lineation and punctuation found in *The Winter's Tale* prompt book. 2012, 7, care of Caro McKay, Broadway, UK.

<sup>265</sup> P. Hall, *Shakespeare's Advice to the Players*, 28; Barton, 30.

In Cheltenham, Hands performed the speech as three distinct movements tied to a progression of Leontes' emotions: wonder, feigned indifference, and utter conviction.<sup>266</sup> From Hermione and Polixenes' exit to his second command that Mamillius "Go play, boy, play," Hands' Leontes was a man registering the sudden shift in his life. Abandoned downstage center by the exiting court, he was already showing signs of distress. He had removed his crown, and the collar of his shirt had been undone, marking a subtle transition from the formal, kingly host of the production's opening moments to the distracted man who would later be seen crying in a dirty vest as he burnt a photograph of Hermione. His first line upon the court's departure was a muted statement of fact ("Gone already"), while the next line ("Inch-thick, knee-deep, o'er head and ears a forked one!") he delivered as phrases building upon one another in disbelief. His weak attempt to brush off the situation prompted Ben Allen's Mamillius, who had been observing his father from upstage left, to cross to Leontes. The boy tried to take his father's sleeve, at which point Hands exploded ("Go play boy, play"). Having rejected Mamillius, Hands paused and crossed upstage to the liquor bottle on the piano ("Thy mother plays and I") allowing the act of pouring to dictate the rhythm of the line and account for a pause before starting the next line with "Play too." Hands carried on ("But so disgraced a part whose issue") and then quickly drank his drink before delivering his next line ("will hiss me to my grave"), integrating the verse-structure and his physical performance. Facing away from Mamillius, Leontes was lost in his own thoughts ("Contempt and clamor will be my knell") and when the boy tried once more to gain his father's attention, Leontes' reaction ("Go play, boy, play") outstripped the first in raw emotion. Leontes erupted as

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<sup>266</sup> Performance observations from this section based on Propeller's archival recording of the production from the Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham. *The Winter's Tale*, by William Shakespeare, adapted by Edward Hall and Roger Warren, Propeller, dir. Edward Hall (Cheltenham: Everyman Theatre, 19-28 January 2012).

he cast Mamillius off with a sharp shaking of his arm. Hands' sudden change in volume and tone contrasted strongly with his previous lines and established the tension within the speech. Leontes was attempting to downplay the situation even as his jealousy gradually took over.

This first movement's performance text relied on Mamillius' attempts to distract his father by pulling on his sleeve and Leontes' own attempts to distract himself with alcohol. Hands sought to define his performance of Leontes with a degree of psychological realism and consulted a psychiatrist friend who explained to him the condition of ““morbid jealousy” which afflicts “very high-achieving, confident alpha males, who drink very heavily.”<sup>267</sup> The idea of drinking seemed to strike a particular chord with Hands and his Leontes was rarely seen in the production's first half without a glass of brandy in hand. The reasoning for Leontes' jealousy, a Stanislavskian tool designed to create a psychologically justifiable motivation for his erratic behavior, inspired the use of the brandy glass as a gestic object. It was used to toast Polixenes in friendly celebration, offered as a token of conspiratorial confidence when discussing his suspicions with Camillo, emptied savagely against the side of the stage when he felt that he had “seen the spider,” and drained in despair before burning a picture of Hermione.<sup>268</sup> Its incorporation into the performance of this speech shows how Hands was able to take the internal subtext developed for his own understanding of the character and develop it into an external performance text that the spectators could observe affecting his actions and speech patterns.

Hands' focus in the second movement shifted from the external influences of Mamillius and the bottle to those of the spectators in the auditorium. The story of Sir

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<sup>267</sup> Quoted in Will Wollen, “Interview with Robert Hands - actor playing Leontes,” *The Winter's Tale* education pack (Propeller: 2012), 20.

<sup>268</sup> Hall and Warren, *Propeller Shakespeare: The Winter's Tale*, 39.

Smile and the prevalence of cuckoldry were explained in a conversational tone which seemed to shrug off the realization his wife may be cheating on him by attempting to reconstitute it as a common experience. After yelling at Mamillius, Hands' Leontes once again changed tone, taking a moment to collect himself ("There have been") and crossed downstage to address the audience. The brief pause which preceded the following line obeyed the line ending and gave the impression of a man steeling himself for an unpleasant task, while Hands delivered the next line ("Or I am much deceived, cuckolds ere now") as an unbroken line of regular iambic pentameter, rushing slightly over the words and achieving a tone of affected nonchalance. Hands' pace steadied and he followed the grammatical phrasing of the next few lines, isolating each assertion that the men he spoke of were present and were in a position similar to himself. Little interpolations — a slight stuttering over "even now," the addition of a vocal hesitation ("and um") before "little thinks" — complimented his action of pointing at specific members of the audience and maintaining their eye contact. These moments showed a man actively seeking affirmation and fervently wishing to convince his listeners that what he said was true. Gradually, his efforts to shrug off his circumstances weakened and Hands started extending his phrasing as Leontes' thoughts began to run away from him. "While other men have gates and those gates opened as mine against their will" and "Should all despair that have revolted wives the tenth of mankind" were each delivered as separate but unbroken thoughts. "Would hang themselves" became isolated, the pause at the end of the previous line adding weight to Leontes' conclusion, seemingly allowing him to regain control.

But in the final section of the speech ("Physic for't there's none..."), Hands allowed Leontes' facade to break and his pacing and tone changed once more. Hands

returned to the verse structure, running through to the end of the line “It is a bawdy planet that will strike where ’tis predominant and powerful think it” and emphasizing “bawdy” as Hermione’s perceived infidelity was expanded to include the entire world. Hands used grammatical phrasing to build to Leontes’ conclusion that “It will let and out the enemy with bag and baggage,” placing stresses on “bag” and “baggage” so that the line became the conclusion of Leontes’ bitter thought exercise and “many thousand on’s have the disease and feel it not” was almost an afterthought. Strikingly, Mamillius approached Leontes in this moment and once again attempted to take his hand. Instead of shaking him off, Hands’ Leontes knelt down and “How now boy?” was spoken with concern. The contrast between his interaction with Mamillius at this moment and his earlier, angry demands his son “Go play, boy, play” showed a transformation had taken place throughout the course of the speech. Leontes was no longer in the throes of terrible suspicion but had accepted his suspicions as certainty, with his verbal working-through of his thoughts acting as a temporary catharsis.

How this speech would sound according to the dictates of verse structure is shown in John Barton’s 1980 BBC program on verse speaking, *Playing Shakespeare*.<sup>269</sup> In *Playing Shakespeare*, Patrick Stewart performs the speech guided by the verse-structure and breathes only at the end of the line, running through all caesura. The effect is to show Leontes as a man who had already lost his composure and was angry, unstable, and completely abandoned to his own thoughts. Similarly, Peter Hall’s view of the speech is that “the changes of pace [dictated by the caesura] show a man possessed, spinning out of control [...] the clauses follow breathlessly on each other.”<sup>270</sup> In these examples, the verse’s structure dictates a performance choice — the pacing and

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<sup>269</sup> John Barton, *Playing Shakespeare* [DVD recording], Vol. 1, ep. 2 “Using the Verse” (Silver Spring, MD.: Athena, 2009).

<sup>270</sup> P. Hall, *Shakespeare’s Advice to the Players*, 165.



phrasing of the speech — which then produces a limited number of choices as to what the character is seeking to express through his words. Hands' skillful handling of the speech found a different interpretation of the character than those offered by Barton and Hall and changed how the audience was asked to see Leontes within the story of *The Winter's Tale*. Praising Hands, reviewers often positioned his performance as an alternative interpretation of Leontes — “disturbed rather than deranged;” “unreasonable but never psychopathic” — implying in their comparisons a departure from a commonly held view of the Sicilian king.<sup>271</sup>

More importantly than carving out an unorthodox approach to the character, Hands' performance choices rendered the speech comprehensible to modern audiences by clearly tracking how Leontes moved from a gracious host to a punishing tyrant. Barton calls Stewart's recitation a “wonderful example of verse,” but both Stewart and Barton agree that the audience may not be able to follow the complex speech were it to be delivered at the pace dictated by the verse lines, and the implication of the exercise is that the audience's understanding is secondary to preserving the verse structure.<sup>272</sup> In Hands' performance, the priorities are reversed. Hands' performance had a slower pace than Stewart's but it embodied Hall's true governing “rule” of Shakespearean verse speaking: is it understandable?

Hands was aided in his performance by a physical performance text which showed Leontes reacting to external forces rather than trying to communicate an invisible, internal subtext in the Stanislavskian tradition. According to Roberta Barker, Stanislavsky presents the spectator with two different sets of information, “the spoken

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<sup>271</sup> Susannah Clapp, “She Stoops to Conquer; Henry V, *The Winter's Tale* – review,” *The Observer*, 5 February 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/feb/05/stoops-to-conquer-propeller-review>, accessed 25 June 2015; Ian Shuttleworth, “Henry V/*The Winter's Tale*, Propeller Theatre Company,” *The Financial Times*, 31 January 2012, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/28f48a82-4b2a-11e1-a325-00144feabdc0.html>, accessed 25 June 2015.

<sup>272</sup> Barton, 37-38.

play-text and a parallel performance text constituted by the actor's 'inner relationship to what he is saying'" wherein the "friction" between the two presents the most possibility for spectators analysis.<sup>273</sup> To have such a friction requires an assumption that the text is somewhat lacking and that there is something beyond the words that needs to be communicated. Subtext emphasizes what the text is *not* saying. By allowing Leontes to respond to the world around him, employing a physical performance whose motivations the audience could recognize, Hands showed Leontes working through his feelings as he spoke rather than speaking to express already formed emotions. This act of "thinking on the line" is another one of Hall's rules which Propeller actors refer to and one which is emphasized as much if not more than observation of the verse structure.<sup>274</sup>

Finally, Hands' use of direct address within the speech shows how Shakespeare's language can also be used to highlight audience complicity and encourage engagement through using what Bridget Escolme terms the "performance objective" of the character.<sup>275</sup> This objective allows the fictional character to acknowledge the audience and attempt to elicit specific responses from them through his words and actions.<sup>276</sup> Though direct address is not an uncommon practice in Shakespearean performance — John Barton believes "it's right ninety-nine times out of a hundred to share a soliloquy with the audience" and that it's a "grave distortion of Shakespeare's intention to do it to oneself" — its impact in performance is variable, and does not always employ this awareness of the fictional character's place within a theatrical framework.<sup>277</sup> Hands' performance did, however, and seemed to

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<sup>273</sup> Roberta Barker, "Inner monologues: Realist acting and/as Shakespearian performance text," *Shakespeare Survey* 62 (2009), 253.

<sup>274</sup> Bell, personal interview; Bruce-Lockhart, personal interview; Trenchard, personal interview; Bruce-Lockhart, *Heavy Pencil*, 20.

<sup>275</sup> Bridget Escolme, *Talking to the Audience: Shakespeare, Performance, Self* (Florence, KY, USA: Routledge, 2005), 41-42.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>277</sup> Barton, 94.

pre-emptively answer questions audiences may have which created the impression that their response could affect his performance.<sup>278</sup> Leontes' performance objective is to introduce doubt into the minds of the spectators and, by doing so, include them in the emotional experience he himself is having so that they become sympathetic to his cause.<sup>279</sup> Leontes' efforts to win the spectators are then countered in the trial scene, where Hermione has the opportunity to make a case for their sympathies and which, in Propeller's production, was another instance of direct address. In contrast, the speed of Stewart's verse-structured reading was internally driven and left no space for him to acknowledge the reactions of an audience, resulting in his objective being inwardly focused and excluding the spectators.

Hands' acknowledgement of the audience and the impression of their influence anticipated Tony Bell's use of direct address as Autolycus in the same production. Entering the stage at the beginning of *The Winter's Tale's* second half, Bell's Autolycus performed a rock version of "When Daffodils begin to peer" which was interspersed with audience banter, often in the form of propositions to female spectators such as this example recorded in Newcastle:

Evening, Madam. Would you like to go tumbling in the hay? Look at me when I'm talking to you. Never mind the smoke, it's just our sexual chemistry. I've served Prince Florizel...<sup>280</sup>

Bell acknowledged the theatrical context in which the conversation was taking place ("Never mind the smoke"), eroding the distance between the actors within a performance and the spectators in the auditorium. The interlude positioned Autolycus' explanation of his present circumstances as part of his seduction technique

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<sup>278</sup> In 2007's *The Taming of the Shrew*, Dugald Bruce-Lockhart's triumphant soliloquy as Petruchio, in which he challenges the audience to speak if "any know better how to tame a shrew" was often met with verbal responses. For more on this moment, see chapter 4.

<sup>279</sup> Escolme addresses how the acknowledgement of the audience can lead to increased sympathy when compared to a "fourth wall" delivery of a soliloquy. 45.

<sup>280</sup> *The Winter's Tale*, by William Shakespeare, adapted by Edward Hall and Roger Warren, Propeller, dir. Edward Hall (Newcastle: Theatre Royal, 24-28 April 2012).

and turned Shakespeare's words ("I've served Prince Florizel...") into part of an extended chat-up line. This method was emphasized by Bell concluding his speech with another interpolation: "Madam, would you reconsider?" Though this exchange is representative of Bell's ad-libbing throughout the tour, Bell's performance was not stable, as shown by Bell's acknowledgment of the woman's response ("Look at me") as well as the prompt book which marks only that Bell should be expected to "ad-lib" during these moments without including any specifications regarding content or duration of these exchanges. Bell's use of direct address went further than Hands' by demanding active participation from the spectators to which it was addressed but similarly framed his soliloquies as moments of outward communication rather than inward reflection. Though actors are free to draw upon their individual methodologies in creating character, and these methodologies may include aspects of psychological realism such as Hands' discovery of the link between morbid jealousy and alcoholism, Propeller's overall production style resists psychological realism in favor of externalizing emotional content and continuously engaging the audience through direct address.<sup>281</sup> As with the visual and physical transitions between choric and named characters, the shifts in focus and delivery continuously disrupt any sustained view of the performance as realistic.

Reviews from Propeller's productions praise the quality of the verse-speaking, confirming that Hall's approach is successful in performance.<sup>282</sup> Reviewing the 2011/2 tour, *Everything Theatre* offered perhaps the most salient praise, saying "the

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<sup>281</sup> Jon Trenchard and Simon Scardifield both cite the lines as being the primary influence in creating their characters. When talking about his performance as Adriana and Titania, James Tucker references the physical process of applying make-up to help connect with what he feels are his characters' motivations, while Chris Myles cites the shoes he wears as aids in developing his female roles. Trencher, personal interview; Taylor; Tucker, personal interview; Myles, personal interview.

<sup>282</sup> Carol Chillington Rutter, "Shakespeare Performance in England (and Wales) 2012," *Shakespeare Survey* 66 (2013), 361; Jason Rabin, "Stage Review: Propeller's 'Comedy of Errors' at the Huntington," *Blast*, 7 June 2011, <http://blastmagazine.com/2011/06/07/stage-review-propellers-comedy-of-errors-at-the-huntington/>, accessed 7 July 2015

Shakespearean verse sounds more like modern-day English than the evening news does.”<sup>283</sup> For all of Hall’s citation of the rules of verse-speaking, the system he has developed for his company is an open approach to the language that allows for experimentation as long as it retains clarity and sense. As has been demonstrated by Robert Hands’ performance as Leontes, creating space to move away from accepted ideas regarding verse can and does result in performances that open up Shakespeare’s plays to new interpretations, displaying the potential for new readings of the stories therein.

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<sup>283</sup> “Propeller: The Winter’s Tale, Hampstead Theatre,” *Everything Theatre*, 12 July 2012, <http://everything-theatre.co.uk/2012/07/propeller-winters-tale-hampstead.html>, accessed 20 June 2015.

## Chapter 4: Propeller in Performance

Thus far, this project has sought to examine Propeller's origins, evolution, and working practices by connecting each aspect of the company's work to its performance potential. It is important to remember, however, that each component part — directorial approach, design, and actors' performances — is not being viewed by audiences in isolation but as part of an interconnected whole. This chapter uses *The Taming of the Shrew* (2006) and *The Merchant of Venice* (2008) as case studies to explore what happens onstage in a Propeller production. These plays offer a myriad of challenges for modern audiences, and therefore modern companies, due to their depictions of misogynistic and anti-Semitic behaviors, respectively. They therefore offer an opportunity to illustrate how Propeller's performance style complicates how Shakespeare's plays are read in performance. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Propeller used the Induction to emphasize how the taming narrative reflects male wish fulfillment and capitalized on the company's physical performance style to unequivocally present a story of domestic violence and submission. Propeller's production of *The Merchant of Venice* similarly highlighted its text's darker aspects through translating the population of Venice from prosperous merchants and money lenders to incarcerated gang members struggling for power. In both productions, the various aspects of Propeller's production style coalesced to encourage a re-examination of Shakespeare's texts.

### The Taming of the Shrew

*Arriving at the theatre, school groups, pensioners, young couples and families, all find themselves welcomed to the wedding nuptials of Christopher Sly and Katherine Minola. Men in black tuxedos and ruffled shirts in a rainbow of pastels chat with patrons in the lobby. Inside the auditorium, a lone disheveled man sits despondently onstage, contemplating a wedding cake and drinking from a flask. The man's*

*clothing — a gray tuxedo and red ruffled shirt — identifies him as part of the wedding party, but his isolation and air of profound unhappiness simultaneously mark him as unique within it. He eventually gets up and staggers offstage. An organ sounds and the focus of activity shifts. The men in tuxedos clear away the cake, set up the chairs, and take their places for the ceremony. One man sings a hymn and the priest joins the father-of-the-bride and the best man at the head of the aisle. They wait. They exchange looks. Someone signals and the hymn is begun again, but, this time, nervously and as a stalling tactic. Christopher Sly — for now it becomes clear that the man in the red shirt is, in fact, the unhappy groom — is nowhere to be seen. With profound weariness, the best man goes to fetch him, leaving the stage and reappearing a moment later, physically compelling Sly towards the paused ceremony. Sly staggers to the head of the aisle, only to topple over unconscious the moment the bride is led out. Sobbing, she exits. Her father is furious. “In my house tonight he shall not rest tonight. Away!” One of the wedding guests intervenes:*

*What think you, if he were conveyed to bed,  
 Wrapped in sweet clothes, rings put upon his fingers,  
 A most delicious banquet by his bed  
 And brave attendants near him when he wakes,  
 Would not the beggar then forget himself?*

*The father is intrigued. Other guests chime in, encouraging the prank, and his decision is made: “Then take him up gently and to bed with him; / And see you manage well the jest.” He gives the wedding party instructions and the men exit.<sup>1</sup>*

Propeller’s 2006 *The Taming of the Shrew* marked a transition period in the company’s history. Continuing a trend that had begun with 2005’s *The Winter’s Tale*, *Shrew* was rehearsed primarily in London rather than at the Watermill. It would be the last Propeller show to open at the tiny Newbury theatre, and it was the penultimate production to be jointly produced with the Watermill.<sup>2</sup> After Newbury, the production was performed as part of the Royal Shakespeare Company’s *Complete Works Festival*, putting Propeller’s work alongside such eclectic companies as Ninagawa, the Berliner Ensemble, Kneehigh, and Tiny Ninja Theatre as part of a “survey of different approaches to [Shakespeare’s] work from around the world.”<sup>3</sup> Propeller’s inclusion in

<sup>1</sup> Action and lines transcribed from performance. Where appropriate, lines are additionally cited according to Propeller’s published play text. Edward Hall and Roger Warren, eds., *Propeller Shakespeare: The Taming of the Shrew* (London: Oberon Books, Ltd., 2013), 23-24.

<sup>2</sup> Though Propeller continued to tour to the Watermill until 2011, the company no longer staged its production as “Watermill” productions and instead performed at the theatre as a visiting company.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Boyd, quoted in Imogen Tilden, “RSC plan year-long Complete Works festival,” *The Guardian*, 11 July 2005, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/jul/11/rsc.theatre>, accessed 13 June 2015.

the festival was a mark of status and acknowledgement of the company's importance as an interpreter of Shakespeare's plays. In January 2007, Propeller opened both *Shrew* and a second production, *Twelfth Night*, at London's Old Vic Theatre, marking Propeller's return to a repertory system which has since become a permanent fixture of the company's producing profile.

All of these factors contributed to *Shrew* ushering in a new stage of Propeller's evolution. Artistically, the production held further significance in that it ardently embraced Propeller's all-male cast in a way the company had not done since *Henry V*'s chorus of soldiers. Retaining the often-cut Induction and interpolating lines from the anonymous play *The Taming of a Shrew*, Edward Hall and Roger Warren created an adaptation that presented the story of Petruchio and Katherine not as a prickly romantic comedy but as a harrowing commentary on domestic violence and toxic masculinity.<sup>4</sup> A number of shifting framing devices invited spectators to constantly re-examine their own complicity in the onstage action, which resulted in a complicated reading of the play and its relevance to modern gender relations. As one reviewer warned, potential theatergoers needed to "be careful where you laugh, or you might wind up hating yourself for it."<sup>5</sup>

The wedding scene that opened the production, described above, was an adaptation of the Induction which appears in *The Taming the Shrew*. In Shakespeare's play, a tinker, Christopher Sly, is temporarily convinced he is a lord. He is then invited to watch "a kind of history" and "a good lesson [...] for a married man."<sup>6</sup> The play that follows is what we now think of as *The Taming of the Shrew*: a battle of wills

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<sup>4</sup> For information regarding the textual editing process, see Chapter 1, 59-62, 64-68. For information specifically regarding how Hall and Warren use the text to create a production framework, see Chapter 3, 214-218.

<sup>5</sup> Mike Rowbottom, "Don't laugh in the wrong places!," *Henley Standard*, 29 September 2006, personal collection of Tony Bell.

<sup>6</sup> Hall and Warren, *Propeller Shakespeare: The Taming of the Shrew*, 26.



between the brutish Petruchio and the shrewish Katherine. Whereas in Shakespeare's play Sly is promoted to "lord" by a stranger looking to play a prank on an inferior, Propeller's Sly (Dugald Bruce-Lockhart) was introduced surrounded by his peers who had gathered to watch him perform a rite of passage. His failure to perform that rite motivates the practical joke, which, in turn, takes on an air of both revenge (wronged father embarrasses future son-in-law) and instruction (failed bridegroom learns what it means to be married). To aid in the jest, Sly's former wedding guests were drafted to perform the other roles within the taming narrative. The connection between clothes and identity which had been hinted at by Michael Pavelka's scenic design — the set comprised of two mirrored wardrobes and a large chest of drawers — was made explicit as the guests pulled jackets, trousers, and ties from the furniture's confines to ready themselves for their performances. The costumes that were claimed fashioned the characters as caricatures. Katherine (Simon Scardifield) and Bianca's (Jon Trenchard) dresses presented them as feminine archetypes, the bad girl in black and combat boots squaring off against the good girl in white and high heels. Once married, these identities were replaced with that of "wife," as neither appeared out of her wedding dress once she had a husband. The male costumes similarly played with stereotypes as they "signposted (and sent up) hyper-masculinities."<sup>7</sup> Lucentio (Tam Williams) first appeared as a matador, evocative of Spanish machismo and killing for sport, before remaking himself as the tutor Cambio, a Buddhist monk (theoretically) impervious to the sexual power of women.

The presentation of the play as a "lesson for married men" hinted at its exclusivity; the play was something that could only be understood by men who have gone through the ritual Sly failed to complete. Once Sly acquiesced to watching this

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<sup>7</sup> Barbara Hodgdon, introduction to *The Taming of the Shrew* by William Shakespeare, ed. Barbara Hodgson (London: Methuen Drama, 2010), 101.

lesson, he was promised to see “a world of pleasure and delight in which [he] may indulge [his] fondest dreams.”<sup>8</sup> And indulge he did. Having watched the first scene of the taming play, Sly was invited to participate in the action as Petruchio, being handed a script and a red leather jacket. Hesitant at first and stumbling over the words, Sly eventually reached Petruchio’s lines detailing the recent death of his father. Excitedly pointing first at the script and then himself, Sly found a point of connection with this new persona. In this moment, Sly and Petruchio became one, and the following action played out not as an instructional performance for Sly to observe but a wish-fulfillment fantasy in which he was completely immersed.

By doubling Sly and Petruchio, Propeller drew on a performance tradition established by Michael Bogdanov’s 1978 RSC production, which realized Sears Jayne’s theory that the play-within-a-play is Sly’s dream.<sup>9</sup> Jayne based this theory on “the extraordinarily close connection between what Sly accomplishes as Petruchio and what Sly wants in his own person in the induction: the dream is a fulfillment of all of Sly’s fundamental wishes.”<sup>10</sup> These wishes were to escape from poverty and to gain mastery over his “wife,” played by a lord’s male page as part of the practical joke. Citing the induction as “crucial to our understanding of the class structure of the play,” Bogdanov saw in the taming narrative “the very mirror image of the situation that [Sly] has been replaying over and over again in his mind: the story of a man demonstrating how to tame a woman.”<sup>11</sup> Hall echoed this perception when he described the play as a “fantasy based on social truth: men discovering how they treat women.”<sup>12</sup> Propeller’s production regarded that fantasy as a “cruel” one and a

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<sup>8</sup> Hall and Warren, *Propeller Shakespeare: The Taming of the Shrew*, 27.

<sup>9</sup> For more on how doubling practice within Propeller productions, see Chapter 3, 187-192.

<sup>10</sup> Sears Jayne, “The Dreaming of the Shrew,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (1966), 52.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Bogdanov, *The Director’s Cut: Essays on Shakespeare*, revised edition (Edinburgh: Capercaillie, 2013), 174, 178.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

program note from Hall and Warren cautioned that “Cruelty is built into the play; the abuse has to be taken seriously.”<sup>13</sup> Moreover, whereas Bogdanov’s comments focus on Sly specifically, a single example of a misogynistic man, Hall’s comments implicate a wider concern regarding the societal context in which *Shrew*’s taming takes place.

Hall’s interpretation of *Shrew* led to a production that rejected recent attempts to rehabilitate the play. Propeller’s production came after high profile productions at the RSC and Shakespeare’s Globe, both in 2003, which had reclaimed the play for those who wish to see it as a sincere, if complicated, love story. The RSC production, paired with John Fletcher’s companion play *The Tamer Tamed*, portrayed *Shrew* as “a life-enhancing comedy about the triumph of marriage over paternal oppression.”<sup>14</sup> The double bill was directed by Gregory Doran, who had previously avoided *Shrew* as he felt “you always have to come up with an artificial way to do the ending.”<sup>15</sup> This comment takes as its foundation a view that the play *must* resolve happily, as if to protect Shakespeare’s mythical image as a playwright for all time rather than a man writing in a deeply sexist period and possibly subscribing to its views. Doran goes on to conclude the play is actually “about love between two misfits,” and therefore poses no “problem” for modern stagings.<sup>16</sup> The second production, produced by Shakespeare’s Globe, was one of two shows that season performed by all-female casts and lessened the impact of Katherine’s treatment by capitalizing on the “terrific fun” which resulted from the actresses’ “guying the rituals and mannerisms of men.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Edward Hall and Roger Warren, “The Waking Man’s Dream: *The Taming of the Shrew*,” in Edward Hall and Roger Warren, eds., *Propeller Shakespeare: The Taming of the Shrew* (London: Oberon Books, Ltd., 2013), 12.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Billington, “The Taming of the Shrew / The Tamer Tamed,” *The Guardian*, 11 April 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2003/apr/11/theatre.artsfeatures2>, accessed 16 June 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Erik Tarloff, “The Play That Tamed ‘Taming of the Shrew,’” *The New York Times*, 14 December 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/14/theater/theater-the-play-that-tamed-taming-of-the-shrew.html>, accessed 16 June 2015.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Lyn Gardner, “The Taming of the Shrew,” *The Guardian*, 23 August 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2003/aug/23/theatre>, accessed 6 May 2015.

Reviewing the production for *The Telegraph*, Charles Spencer felt “the staging leaves no doubt that the *Shrew* is also a fine romance.”<sup>18</sup>

But attempts to downplay *Shrew*’s ugly qualities risk advocating its message by couching Petruchio’s torturous treatment of Katherine as light-hearted fun. This danger was highlighted by the first half of Propeller’s production, which encouraged laughter and portrayed Petruchio as a charming rogue. For his second wedding (the one he would do right, the one that would prove him worthy), Sly/Petruchio wore symbols of the American wild west. Barbra Hodgdon describes this time period as one “where men were men and women were women” and which “gives comic permission to macho masculinity and violent taming tactics” when used in productions.<sup>19</sup> In Propeller’s staging, the beginning of this wedding scene signaled a continuation of the production’s thus-far broad humor. Sly’s fringed leather jacket, boots, and cowboy hat were accompanied only by one very small Speedo, and the comical inappropriateness of the outfit was accompanied by sight gags such as Petruchio urinating into (and then donning) his Stetson. Once Petruchio had married Katherine, however, the tone took a much darker turn. As described by actor Simon Scardifield, who played Katherine in the production, Petruchio treated his new wife “like something between a dog and an unwanted toy.”<sup>20</sup> At the end of the wedding, Petruchio compelled Katherine to go with him by dragging her offstage and through the auditorium by her hair. In the tailor scene, she became his doll, pushed and pulled, thrown over a table, and roughly bent over by Grumio (Jason Baugham) to provide a visual punchline to his confusion

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<sup>18</sup> Charles Spencer, “Gender bending revives a dying art,” *The Telegraph*, 25 August 2003, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3601295/Gender-bending-revives-dying-art.html>, accessed 16 June 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Hodgdon, 102.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Will Woolen, “Interview with Simon Scardifield – Katherine,” *The Taming of the Shrew* education pack (The Watermill Theatre, 2006), 12.

over the order to “take up my mistress’ gown to his master’s use.”<sup>21</sup> By the time Katherine was commanded to Bianca and the widow “What duty they do owe their husbands,” she was a broken woman, and reviewers referenced Stockholm syndrome when describing Scardifield’s shell-shocked delivery of Katherine’s final speech.<sup>22</sup>

When asked about Propeller’s all-male casting, company members usually refer either to its ties to original practice or cite it as part of an overall approach that encourages audience complicity.<sup>23</sup> However, *Shrew* notably saw actors explicitly connecting this policy to the conceptual approach to the play, crediting the single-sex cast with permitting the production’s physical brutality. Though a Propeller rehearsal room is not devoid of women — *Shrew*’s program lists five as part of its stage crew — the gender imbalance of characters in Shakespeare’s plays can lead to an intimidating atmosphere for an actress. In *Clamorous Voices*, actress Fiona Shaw explained:

You are often the only woman in the room. It’s an old refrain but it goes on being a relevant state that affects the performance we ultimately give. Men don’t experience it, so they never have to deal with it [...] Men, together, sometimes speak a funny language. You don’t know what’s happening, and you get so confused that you can no longer see.<sup>24</sup>

Shaw’s description describes actresses as occupying a vulnerable position within the rehearsal room. The consequence of this vulnerability is that actresses may be

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<sup>21</sup> Hall and Warren, *Propeller Shakespeare: The Taming of the Shrew*, 77. For more on violence in Propeller productions, see Chapter 1, 44-48.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 92; Benedict Nightingale, “Theatre: The Taming of the Shrew / Twelfth Night,” *The Times*, 19 January 2007, 22; Ben Brantley, “Be It Padua or Illyria, Boys Will Be Boisterous,” *The New York Times*, 20 March 2007, [http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/20/theater/reviews/20brantley.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/20/theater/reviews/20brantley.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0), accessed 7 July 2015;

<sup>23</sup> For more on the company’s explanation of the all-male cast, see pages 190-204.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in Carol Rutter, *Clamorous Voices* (London: The Women’s Press, 1988), vxii.

reluctant to expose themselves and their characters to further subjection.<sup>25</sup> Not every actress will feel intimidated, of course, nor will every rehearsal environment in which there is a gender imbalance create such a division. However, the potential for discomfort is significant, especially when coupled by a hesitancy on the part of the male actor. When asked, generally, about the different rehearsal dynamic within the all-male company, actor Vince Leigh, admitted that if a play required him to “hit a woman, I would always have a worry that I might actually be hurting her,” referencing his six-foot-two frame as a contributing factor to his reluctance.<sup>26</sup>

In a later interview, given while Leigh was performing Petruchio in Propeller’s 2013 revival, he addressed the use of physical violence in *Shrew* specifically, saying he felt co-ed casting for a production that took Propeller’s violent approach “would also make it more difficult on the audience.”<sup>27</sup> This repeats a view expressed by members of the 2006 company, including Scardifield who said he didn’t “think you could have done it with a woman — it might have been upsetting for an audience in the wrong way.”<sup>28</sup> Scardifield does not specify what constitutes the “wrong way,” but presumably he is referring to a spectator’s concern for the actress pulling attention away from the story onstage. Actor Jon Trenchard’s comments support this interpretation as he felt the fact audiences are “imagining it’s a woman and imagining the brutality, but aware

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<sup>25</sup> Exploring the performance of “women centered plays of Shakespearean comedy,” Penny Gay wrote, “The actresses who perform these major roles must always feel outnumbered — patronised or disregarded — and respond at some level of their performance to this disempowerment, with submission, aggression, defensiveness, or irony.” *Shakespeare’s Unruly Women* (London: Routledge, 1994), 10. Interviewed in 2012 about her role as the eponymous Julius Caesar in Phyllida’s Lloyd’s production at the Donmar Warehouse, actress Frances Barber referred to the fact the all-female cast made the actors “feel safe and protected enough to experiment without fear of failure.” Quoted in Grace Henderson, “Interview with Frances Barber, Julius Caesar at Donmar Warehouse,” *Aesthetica*, <http://www.aestheticamagazine.com/interview-with-frances-barber-julius-caesar-at-donmar-warehouse>, accessed 16 June 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Abigail Rokison, *Shakespeare for Young People: Productions, Versions and Adaptations* (London: Arden, 2013), 124.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Kristen Hirsch Montag, “British Propeller’s TAMING OF THE SHREW Actors Dish on Shakespeare and Minneapolis (Part Two),” *Broadway World*, 29 March 2013, <http://www.broadwayworld.com/minneapolis/article/BWW-Interviews-British-Propellers-TAMING-OF-THE-SHREW-Actors-Dish-on-Shakespeare-and-Minneapolis-Part-Two-20130329>, accessed 14 June 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Jane Edwards, “In the company of men: Twelfth Night and The Taming of the Shrew,” *TimeOut London*, 8 January 2007, <http://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/in-the-company-of-men-twelfth-night-and-the-taming-of-the-shrew>, accessed 16 June 2015.

that it's not real because it's a man [...] makes it okay to watch."<sup>29</sup> Writing for *The British Theatre Guide*, reviewer Pete Wood also felt the all-male cast "probably mitigates the deep disquiet we would feel if an actress was subjected to the sort of aggression metered out."<sup>30</sup>

Though Wood saw this as a drawback of the all-male casting, it eradicates the need for spectators to justify the behavior by viewing that treatment as light-hearted or boys-being-boys antics. The taming narrative risks rewarding those who want to excuse Petruchio's behavior as part of a courtship ritual. Preferring Doran's 2003 production, Michael Billington lamented in his review of Propeller's *Shrew* that "when you see Petruchio taming a male Kate, the play loses much of its erotic charge: there should be both sexiness and danger in the central relationship."<sup>31</sup> Billington's comment indicates a female presence onstage would make the play's "psychological cruelty" exciting without acknowledging the disturbing implication of the observation.<sup>32</sup> By regretting Propeller's version of the play resisted a reading of *Shrew* as a sexy comedy, Billington demonstrates how the all-male company disrupts the audience's ability to approve of or excuse the plays' behavior.

Billington's comments gesture towards societal collusion in domestic abuse, another key theme in Propeller's production. The mirrors which adorned Pavelka's wardrobes, and which ran along the back wall of the playing space, constantly reflected the spectators in the auditorium. These reflections displayed the audience as silently complicit in the unfolding action, watching without preventing the cruelty

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<sup>29</sup> Jon Trenchard, personal interview, London, 12 June 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Pete Wood, "The Taming of the Shrew (The Watermill, Newbury)," *The British Theatre Guide*, 2006, <http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/shrewpropeller-rev>, accessed 16 June 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Billington, "Men in tights pair sublime ambivalence with coarse cruelty," *The Guardian*, 18 January 2007, 36.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

enacted onstage.<sup>33</sup> According to Trenchard, the presence or absence of women in the audience continuously altered the production's reception:

At the Watermill Theatre, which is quite small, you'd have some performances that were male heavy. When Kate was being flung around, they would shout "Hear, hear." And that of course makes all the women in the audience feel very different, especially compared with the other night when they were practically all women and they laughed their heads off all the way through.<sup>34</sup>

The implication in Trenchard's observation is that the societal context in which the violence was viewed changed its perception. When a predominantly male audience responded favorably to domestic violence onstage, it revealed the extent to which society condones and even encourages such behavior. A predominantly female audience, however, was not made to confront these attitudes in the same way and was able to distance themselves and therefore enjoy the performance.

The behaviors scrutinized in Propeller's performance were not confined to Petruchio. When Petruchio compelled Katherine offstage after their wedding, they left the wedding party silently watching them depart. The actors' gazes were directed at the audience, creating a mirror image between the parties onstage and those in the auditorium. The exit echoed the rough treatment previously demonstrated in the production by Baptista (Bob Barrett), who had pushed Bianca (Jon Trenchard) into a wardrobe and locked her inside as well as shoved Katherine towards Petruchio for her wooing. Having seen the results of his actions, he failed to appreciate his responsibility. Instead of expressing regret or concern over how he had contributed to Katherine's plight, Baptista repeated his actions, physically maneuvering Bianca to "take her sister's place" and encouraging the guests to participate in mock feast to celebrate the

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<sup>33</sup> For more information on Pavelka's consideration of the audience and the use of reflective surfaces, see also Chapter 2, 105-106, 117-118.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Edwardes,



other marriage he had arranged between his youngest daughter and the highest bidder.<sup>35</sup> All the while, the mirrored back wall of the stage gave spectators an image of themselves sitting silently, allowing the mistreatment of women to continue.

Petruchio's harsh treatment of Katherine and the stunned silence of the wedding guests invited spectators to question what they might do in a similar situation, a question which was then brought to the forefront when actor Dugald Bruce-Lockhart solicited responses from the audience regarding his treatment of Katherine. Before delivering Petruchio's speech in which he outlines his taming tactics, Bruce-Lockhart sent Petruchio's servants scurrying away with an aggravated gesture of violence, raising his fist in a sharp, jagged motion. Alone, Bruce-Lockhart turned to the audience and began to explain how he had "politicly begun [his] reign."<sup>36</sup> After detailing the treatment in store for Katherine, including sleep deprivation and starvation, Bruce-Lockhart came to the speech's concluding lines: "He that knows better how to tame to a shrew / Now let him speak, tis charity to show."<sup>37</sup> Bruce-Lockhart extended his arms out in an open, welcoming gesture as he leant towards the audience, his eyebrows raised in an inquisitive expression. Waiting a beat, he cocked his head and pointedly looked at individual spectators, ad-libbing encouragement for a response.

On more than one occasion, he got one. Remembering this moment, Bruce-Lockhart recalls a range of reactions, from "That's the way you do it, son," to "Bullshit, mate!" Playing with the audience, Bruce-Lockhart would further engage with spectators, at one performance bringing a woman onstage and giving her a kiss and, at another, challenging a man to "Come up here and say that."<sup>38</sup> In these

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<sup>35</sup> Hall and Warren, *Propeller Shakespeare: The Taming of the Shrew*, 63.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Dugald Bruce-Lockhart, personal interview, London, 11 June 2014.

moments, Bruce-Lockhart simultaneously occupied the position of actor/character and invited spectators to participate in the debate playing out onstage. Whereas Katherine's wedding seemingly prevented intervention through its context as part of the fictional world, Bruce-Lockhart's breaking of the fourth wall invited commentary and incorporated the audience's reactions into the production's investigation of violence and gender.<sup>39</sup> Responses that encouraged Petruchio's behavior displayed how prevalent the attitudes on display continue to be, while resistance to his methods or audience silence had the potential to raise questions about the perceived propriety of intervention. This speech, occurring towards the beginning of Petruchio's violent campaign, established awareness of the spectators which re-occurred throughout the rest of the play. Katherine's line "Sorrow on thee and all the pack of you / That triumph thus upon my misery" was directed at the audience, which Stephen Purcell found to suggest "that in our enjoyment of her suffering during the earlier, more farcical scenes, we had implicitly endorsed the very behaviour which had led to her present abjection."<sup>40</sup> In both instances, the actors called spectators' attentions to themselves as present within the story and therefore able to intercede.

Shakespeare's text lacks a conclusion to the Induction, and Sly's character eventually disappears from the text altogether, leaving a difficult question for directors as to how to account for his absence. One option is to interpolate text from *The Taming of a Shrew*, an anonymous version of the play thought by some to be a pirated copy of Shakespeare's text. In *A Shrew*, Sly falls asleep during the play-within-a-play and wakes at the end to reflect on his dream, not unlike Bottom's bemused awakening in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Propeller used the ending to different effect. Initially

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<sup>39</sup> For more on Propeller's use of direct address, see Chapter 3, 249-259.

<sup>40</sup> Hall and Warren, *Propeller Shakespeare: The Taming of the Shrew*, 73; Stephen Purcell, *Popular Shakespeare: Simulation and Subversion on the Modern Stage* (Basingstoke: Palsgrave Macmillan, 2009), 94.

following Shakespeare's text, the production concluded the taming plot with Bianca's wedding, the husbands' wager, and Katherine's recitation on the virtues of womanly obedience. Petruchio/Sly was duly credited with having "tamed a cursed shrew," but, in his moment of triumph, he was then abandoned.<sup>41</sup> The other actors left the stage, leaving Sly alone and bewildered, only to be joined a moment later but by "Kate" — still wearing the tattered wedding dress but now the reclaimed "he" of the production's opening moments. Sly proudly proclaimed "I know now how to tame a shrew," and was met not by praise by "Kate"'s withering rejoinder: "Are you drunken still? This was but a play."<sup>42</sup> The production's final words were not Shakespeare's but Propeller's, through which the production rejected the application of *Shrew's* example. Moreover, these words emphasized the theatrical nature of the play-within-a-play and Sly's exclusion from it, returning the character to the audience's side of the theatrical divide. Consequently, the events of the taming plot were shown to belong as much to the audience as much as to Sly.

Propeller's *Shrew* demonstrates how the company's particular aesthetic and working practices resulted in a production that offered a complex reading of Shakespeare's play. The all-male cast was able to engage in highly physical interactions that emphasized the cruelty of Katherine's treatment without inspiring concern for the performers which would distract from the message. The use and adaptation of the Induction preserved the metatheatrical quality that marks many of Propeller's productions and created an atmosphere where the audience was invited and even encouraged to comment on the action onstage. *The Taming of the Shrew* both recalled the company's original formation around a single idea — a band of all-male

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<sup>41</sup> Hall and Warren, *Propeller Shakespeare: The Taming of the Shrew*, 93.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

soldiers — and anticipated the ways in which the all-male company would alter the company's reading of *The Merchant of Venice* two years later.

## The Merchant of Venice

*Two levels of bars form three walls of cells around the perimeter of the stage. One by one, in variations of drab prison blues, men appear within these cells. They lean against their confines or sullenly sit, staring at the floor. Some challenge those of us in the auditorium with their eyes, their stares emphasizing the distance between their world and ours. The audience's gaze is recognized and returned. Everyone is watching everyone. The tense silence is suddenly broken as the men begin to test their physical boundaries, filling the space with the sound of metal buckets and plates coming in contact with the bars in a percussive rhythm, the noise augmented by the shouts of the men inside. A man in a warden's uniform appears outside the cells. Carrying a set of keys, he systematically releases the prisoners to the center of the stage, each one falling silent as he takes his place in front of his cell, creating a half circle within the open space. Another man, this one immaculate in a white suit, enters from stage left. Standing downstage center, he surveys the audience and poses a question: "Which is the Christian, here, and which the Jew?"<sup>43</sup>*

*The Merchant of Venice* is another play which poses difficulties for modern audiences. Though the Jewish Shylock appears in only five scenes, the character has become a lightning rod for discussions regarding the play's perceived anti-Semitism. The after-effects of World War II have led to productions struggling with how to characterize Shylock, often opting to provide sympathetic motivation for his pursuit of the bond.<sup>44</sup> Propeller's production widened its focus beyond Shylock, placing the story in a setting whose transactions took place in a prison courtyard rather than on the Rialto. "Venice" and "Belmont" were reimagined as cell blocks and the tensions between Christians and Jews resembled gang warfare far more than religious oppression. The prison setting achieved two results. First, it created an environment in

<sup>43</sup> Action and lines transcribed from performance. Propeller has not published a play text for *The Merchant of Venice*, and lines in this section are additionally cited according to Stanley Wells, Gary Taylor, John Jowett and William Montgomery, eds. *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). This line is a version of Portia's line, "Which is the merchant here, and which the Jew?" IV.i.170.

<sup>44</sup> Dennis Kennedy writes that "The fate of the Jews under Hitler, and our almost continual subsequent awareness of the horrors of the death camps, have completely transformed our ability to read it anywhere." *Looking at Shakespeare: A Visual History of Twentieth-Century Performance*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 200.

which all characters were immediately read as “guilty” regardless of their religious affiliation. Second, it addressed the needs of Propeller as an all-male, ensemble company by establishing a homosocial environment which accounted for the company’s choric presence. As with *Henry V*, the all-male cast was given an easily recognized context but, unlike the soldier chorus which had clear textual connections to the battle of Agincourt, the prison setting drew on themes in Shakespeare’s text to radically alter the community in which the story unfolded.

Unlike *The Taming of the Shrew*, whose text supplied Hall and Warren with a framework to adapt, *The Merchant of Venice*’s text begins in *media res*, dropping into a conversation already in progress between the merchant Antonio and his friends Salanio and Salarino. To situate the production, Hall and Warren transposed Portia’s line from act 4, scene 1 and reassigned it to the man who would later be identified in the production as the Duke (Babou Ceesay).<sup>45</sup> By opening with the Duke’s challenge to identify the Christian and the Jew, the production drew attention to the similarities of the two factions, all the more indistinguishable in their prison uniforms. Wearing a pristine white suit which signaled to audiences that he operated outside of the prison culture, Ceesay stood between the two sets of prisoners. The stage picture was that of a delicately calibrated scale, a visual which could be read as a subtle nod to the scales which would be provided to measure the pound of flesh. In answer to Ceesay’s charge, two prisoners came forward, only differentiated by the knitted cap one of them wore. Facing the audience, the bare-headed prisoner began to speak: “In sooth I know not why I am so sad...”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> For information regarding the textual editing process, see Chapter 1, 59-62, 64-68. For information specifically regarding how Hall and Warren use the text to create a production framework, see Chapter 3, 214-218.

<sup>46</sup> I.i.1.

The regimented arrangement of bodies on stage, the authority of Ceesay, and his initial charge and the response of the prisoner directed towards the audience all combined to create the impression of a trial. But then, the spell was broken. A shrill whistle sounded and the prisoners onstage relaxed, forming small groups engaged in the business of prison life. Antonio (Bob Barrett), the prisoner who had been speaking, shifted his focus to his friend (Salerio, a composite of Shakespeare's Salerio, Salarino, and Salanio played by Sam Swainsbury) and continued his speech in a conversational rather than presentational tone. In rehearsals, Hall had described the setting to the cast as "a kind of purgatory perhaps, where Jews and Christians are waiting for judgment, or reliving past arguments to try to achieve some kind of redemption."<sup>47</sup> Though the production never explicitly situated the prison as existing in a supernatural realm, the opening moments hinted at this reading through its visual connotations of arbitration and judgement and the contrasting performance styles of Barrett's opening speech.

While questions of divine judgement continued to thread through the production, particularly noticeable in the hymns, gospel, and traditional Jewish music used to score the production, the central focus was the human interactions of the prison culture. In approaching *Merchant*, Hall sought to set it "in a place where the racial tensions and commercial ruthlessness in the play would make sense to a modern audience."<sup>48</sup> Moreover:

There's an unbelievable mix of people in prisons and I thought if we explored the story in that environment it might push us to more extreme explorations of how we stage the play [...] In prison, people

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<sup>47</sup> Jon Trenchard, "The *Merchant* 'Blog,'" in Will Wooten, *The Merchant of Venice* education pack, (Propeller Theatre Company, 2013), 30.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. Phyllida Lloyd had similar motivations for setting her 2012 all-female production of *Julius Caesar* in a prison: "By setting it in a prison we are creating a world in which violence is ever-possible, freedom is restricted, power and hierarchy are the meat and drink of every person who is incarcerated; where status is important, and where superstition is rife." Quoted in Hannah Price, "A conversation with Phyllida Lloyd, director," in *Julius Caesar: Behind the Scenes*, ed. Sam Maynard (London: Donmar Warehouse, 2012), 21.

live in a very tense situation, where things could boil over in a second into intense violence. And the whole system runs on money and control, which felt like a good comparison to Venice.<sup>49</sup>

Hall's explanation focuses on finding an "environment" and parallel "system" to that of Shakespeare's Venice, emphasizing the play's community rather than its individual characters. The prison setting changed the environment of Shakespeare's play, but in doing so provided a place where the context of the play's actions were immediately rendered clear to modern audiences. In prison, men are made to negotiate a system where they constantly reaffirm both their identity and their place within a hierarchical structure.<sup>50</sup> This is not unlike the posturing that occurs between Antonio and Shylock or amongst Portia's suitors. Reputation, power, exchange of goods and favors, and the importance of allegiances are all found in Shakespeare's text and were all emphasized in Propeller's version of Venice.

As well as providing a clear context for *Merchant's* various systems of exchange, the prison was an opportunity for the production to explore the conditions that lead to violent behavior. These conditions were exacerbated by the feelings of entrapment and isolation embodied in Pavelka's scenic design. This prison was laid out according to the template that is common to many of Propeller's productions: three levels of cells which created a U-shaped perimeter around the stage, leaving the center open and with individual cells which could be detached from the framing structure and moved to the center to signal changes in location and time.<sup>51</sup> Pavelka's set was also central to creating the production's soundscape, and he acknowledges his choice of materials led to "aural, percussive possibilities that punctuated the dialogue with

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<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Vanessa Lawrence, "Hall of Fame: Edward Hall at BAM," *Woman's Wear Daily*, 12 May 2009, <http://wwd.com/eye/people/hall-of-fame-director-edward-hall-at-bam-2129069/>, accessed 17 June 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Mahuya Bandyopadhyay, "Competing Masculinities in a Prison," *Men and Masculinities* 9 (2006), 188; Tony Evans and Patti Wallace, "A Prison within a Prison?: The Masculinity Narratives of Male Prisoners," *Men and Masculinities* 10 (June 2008) 487; Jow Sim "Tougher than the rest? Men in Prison," in *Just Boys Doing Business? Men, Masculinities and Crime*, eds. Tim Newburn and Elizabeth A. Stanko (London: Routledge, 1994), 100-117.

<sup>51</sup> For information regarding Pavelka's scenic design structure, see Chapter 2, 107-112.

rhythmic hammering and door slamming. Steel-on-steel clatter and scraping, using the furniture and props, was integral to the performance's soundscape."<sup>52</sup> The continuous sound of metal-on-metal established an atmosphere of confinement, claustrophobia, and escalating pressure within the prison world as the prisoners repeatedly hit against their cage-like cells. The scenic design also ensured that no moment in the play could be considered private. As the driving action unfolded in the central playing space, the choric presence remained visible around the stage's perimeter, the prisoner-chorus continuing the constant transactions of money and favors that occur in a jail, acting out their own narratives yet still responding to the main action in moments where the prison yard threatened to erupt into violence.<sup>53</sup> Such a framework altered the usual function of Propeller's metatheatricality. Whereas in other productions the choric presence observed a communal effort to tell a story, the tensions between factions meant that this was no all-in-this-together endeavor but a series of power plays enacted in front of a hostile audience. When Shylock and Antonio sealed the bond in Antonio's cell — the cubicle removed from the set's frame and brought center stage, the men clasping sliced palms over a paint bucket, the blood intermingling as it dripped down — other prisoners scaled the cell from the outside, creating a secondary container in addition to the one formed by the bars. Antonio and Shylock were not only operating within a literal prison, but also within the one created by the constant observation of their peers. In such an environment, each man was constantly forced to re-assert his power over the other.

Just as the scenic design slightly altered the nature of Propeller's metatheatrical framework, Pavelka's costumes diverged from Propeller's usual interplay between the

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<sup>52</sup> Michael Pavelka, "The Merchant of Venice," Michael Pavelka website, <http://www.michaelpavelka.com/research/research-excellence-framework/the-merchant-of-venice/>, accessed 7 May 2015.

<sup>53</sup> For information regarding the choric presence and scenic design, see Chapter 2, 116-120.



choric and named characters. The base costume for all of the actors, save the Duke and Launcelot Gobbo (played by John Dougall as a corrupt prison guard), was a standard prison uniform of dark greyish-blue trousers and button-down work shirts which allowed Pavelka to “overlay outward signs of identity such as status, sexual orientation and creed” and which were customized by each actor through collaborations with Pavelka “concentrating on signs and symbols that hinted groupings, gangs or urban tribes (including tattoos).”<sup>54</sup> Bassanio wore red fingerless gloves, Salanio had a waistcoat, and Shylock and Tubal observed their religion through a knitted cap and prayer shawl, respectively. Despite these small personalizations, there was no overarching visual distinction between the two factions that could be viewed as presenting one side as more sympathetically portrayed than the other. According to Hall, the prison setting “took away the need to answer the question what do people look like,” citing the visual differences between Christians and Jews in a production as “a major stumbling block in terms of how people perceive the anti-Semitism.”<sup>55</sup> There was also no clear differentiation between when an actor was to be viewed as a choric as opposed to a named character. Instead, the actors constantly represented both, seen as a people in their own right while always retaining the identity of “prisoner” and “criminal” marked by their uniforms.<sup>56</sup>

Within this environment, Antonio and Shylock represented two types of “big men” operating within the prison system: those who are violent and those who can procure things others cannot.<sup>57</sup> Much of the Propeller’s production revolved around these two approaches. The negotiation between Antonio and Shylock over the bond

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Ann Mccauley Basso, “The Portia Project: The Heiress of Belmont on Stage and Screen,” (PhD diss., University of South Florida, 2011), 159.

<sup>56</sup> For more information regarding choric costumes, see Chapter 2, 129-134.

<sup>57</sup> Evans and Wallace, 494.

seemed to take place in a prison courtyard where the population was gathered during a recreational hour, providing a large audience for their interaction. Each sat on a rough wooden chair, Antonio stage right and Shylock stage left, behind which stood members of the appropriate religious faction. In this setting, Shylock's repetition of the terms became a man exulting in his power over another. In her essay, "On the Economic Rhetoric of Revenge in *The Merchant of Venice*," Linda Woodbridge identifies the bond negotiations as a series of small revenges: Shylock bringing Antonio within his power in response to previous insults, Antonio responding with a disrespectful change from "you" to "thou" in his speech, and Shylock capping the escalation with the terms of Antonio's forfeit.<sup>58</sup> Propeller's staging of this scene built on these relationships present in the text by translating the subtle shifts in language to physical actions which modern audiences could easily read as displays of power. As Shylock, Richard Clothier adopted a casual, slightly mocking tone during the beginning of this scene and frequently spoke over his shoulder to Jessica (Jon Trenchard) and Tubal (Thomas Padden). This gesture repeatedly emphasized Shylock's strength within the exchange, and drew attention to the onstage audience watching Antonio seek aid from him. To regain his position, Antonio (Bob Barrett) responded with violence, knocking a chair over as he leapt from his position to hold a knife to Shylock's throat. The positions of power reversed as Shylock's financial advantage was replaced by Antonio's physical one. The threat dissipated when someone whistled, alerting the prisoners to the presence of the prison warden. As the other prisoners hastened back inside their cells, Shylock slumped forward, running his hands over his face in a gesture of relief before he reached into his pocket and drew out a number of folded bills, which he then handed to the warden — payment for

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<sup>58</sup> Linda Woodbridge, "On the Economic Rhetoric of Revenge in *The Merchant of Venice*," in *Shakespeare and the Cultures of Performance*, ed. Paul Yachnin and Patricia Badir (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 37.

protection. When, later in the scene, Antonio again physically threatened Shylock, the warden appeared once more, blowing on his whistle and making warning noises. Shylock's money was thereby directly linked to his status within the prison culture, clarifying the consequences for both Antonio's eventual forfeit and Jessica's theft.

The prison's "women" became another commodity and symbol of power within the jail.<sup>59</sup> Departing from Propeller's standard practice of asking spectators to accept the female characters as "real" women within the narrative, *Merchant's* female characters were portrayed as male prisoners who had feminized themselves. Reviewers referred to the women as "female-impersonators who've been banged up in a high-security men's prison," identified them as "fierce transvestites," and described the performances as "beyond gender."<sup>60</sup> In this world, what marked Portia as desirable was not her beauty or a promise of freedom — "she" was as much a prisoner as those suitors pursuing her — but her ability to imbue a prisoner with power. Before each contestant in the casket lottery took his choice, he presented Nerissa with a sizable sum of money. This exchange established that only those with access to the requisite funds were able to participate and contextualized the casket lottery as part of the larger system of exchange that defined the prison's power structure. Portia's wealth would ensure her partner would be able to exert control over his surroundings, raising the stakes of the lottery through the context in which it was taking place.

Establishing Portia as a commodity and mark of influence within the jail supported the production's alteration of Jessica's relationship to Shylock to one of allegiance rather than blood. The nature of the familial relationships was a topic of

<sup>59</sup> For information regarding Propeller's personation of women, see Chapter 3, 195-209.

<sup>60</sup> Dominic Cavendish, "A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Merchant of Venice, review," *The Telegraph*, 3 February 2009, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/dominic-cavendish/4449062/A-Midsummer-Nights-Dream-and-The-Merchant-of-Venice-review.html>, accessed 17 June 2015; Roseanne Wells, "Merchant in the Slammer," *PlayShakespeare.com*, 12 May 2009, <https://www.playshakespeare.com/merchant-of-venice-reviews/theatre-reviews/3774-merchant-in-the-slammer>, accessed 17 June 2015; Carol Chillington Rutter, "Shakespeare Performances in England 2009," *Shakespeare Survey* 63 (2010), 366.

discussion for the company during rehearsals, and it was decided within the prison that “father” did not refer to biological kinship but to a relationship built around paternal protection.<sup>61</sup> Whereas Portia and Nerissa’s costumes differentiated them from the rest of the prison world through gaudy feminine trappings, Jessica only had a kerchief and slightly long apron to identity “him” as “her.” The lack of ostentatious embellishment to her uniform marked Jessica as lower in the prison hierarchy than then other women. Trenchard’s physical timidity in his performance and physical actions — fetching a chair for Shylock to sit on in the bond negotiation, making the bunk beds in the cell they shared, scrubbing the toilet cistern in the same — communicated his position of subservience to the more powerful prisoner. In Shakespeare’s text, Shylock and Jessica have only one scene together, but in Propeller’s production Jessica accompanied him until her elopement. Jessica was a commodity, just as Portia, and her subservience to Shylock was a symbol of his position.

Many previous productions have used Jessica’s elopement as the moment that catalyzed Shylock’s pursuit of the bond, focusing on the emotional damage her abandonment has on him. Henry Irving’s 1879 production cut references to ducats and famously staged Shylock’s return and reaction to his empty house.<sup>62</sup> Almost a century later, Jonathan Miller’s 1970 production at the NT portrayed Shylock’s revenge as resulting entirely from “the anguish of a bereaved father.”<sup>63</sup> David Thacker’s 1993 production at the RSC used similar tactics, which resulted in a production in which “the complex tensions between Christians and Jew were oversimplified in the extreme.”<sup>64</sup> Gregory Doran’s 1997 RSC production, Trevor

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<sup>61</sup> Basso, 166.

<sup>62</sup> James C. Bulman, *Shakespeare in Performance: The Merchant of Venice* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 36-38; John O’Connor, “Shylock in Performance,” in *The Merchant of Venice: New Critical Essays*, eds. John W. Mahon and Ellen Macleod Mahon (London: Routledge, 2002), 393.

<sup>63</sup> Bulman, 89.

<sup>64</sup> John Drakakis, introduction to *The Merchant of Venice*, by William Shakespeare, ed. John Drakakis (London: Methuen Drama, 2010), 141.

Nunn's 1999 NT production, and Michael Bogdanov's 2003 production are further examples that have used Jessica's elopement as a turning point for Shylock's character.<sup>65</sup>

Propeller's re-imagining of Jessica's abandonment as a defection as opposed to an elopement changed its implications for Shylock's pursuit of the bond. Her decision to leave Shylock followed Gobbo's earlier departure and contributed to the decline of Shylock's influence, while her theft of Shylock's money deprived him of the means by which he exerted influence and protected himself. To lose both Jessica and the money she stole was a crippling blow to Shylock's reputation and showed him as weak. In Shakespeare's text, act 2, scene 8 contains a description of both Shylock's reaction to Jessica's elopement and Bassanio's departure. In Propeller's production, both of these moments were staged rather than reported, performed by the characters in front of the Christian prisoners who remained onstage after Jessica and Lorenzo's exit.<sup>66</sup> Running on from stage right, Shylock frantically searched for Jessica and his money, calling for "Justice!" and for someone to "Find the girl! She has the stones on her!"<sup>67</sup> His frantic cries were picked up by the Christians onstage, creating a call-and-response that mocked Shylock and marked a change in his position within the prison hierarchy.

Faced with this situation, Propeller's Shylock was no piteous grieving father asking for compassion. At the height of Shylock's anguish, Salerio mocked his decision to pursue the bond: "Why, I'm sure if he forfeit, thou wilt not take his flesh. What's that good for?" Salerio's taunting was a reminder of Shylock's helplessness; an indication that Shylock's weakened position meant that he would not have the courage to pursue the terms of the bond. Stripped of his influence, Shylock turned to violence,

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 148, 155, 156.

<sup>66</sup> For information regarding Propeller's decision to stage reported events, see Chapter 3, 214-218.

<sup>67</sup> Performance analysis corresponds with III.i.49-54.

abruptly striking Salerio in the head with the empty cash box he had been clutching and using his belt to bind Salerio's hands, drag him across the stage, and tie him to cell walls as he recounted Antonio's crimes against him. He concluded his litany of abuses with the reason: "I am a Jew." At this, the assembled prisoners laughed derisively, including Salerio who went so far as to spit blood at Shylock's face. The back and forth between the men was a game of escalation, a test to see who would break first and who would show himself to be the stronger man. Both the Christian and the Jew were shown as utterly unsympathetic, entirely brutal, rashly willing to push the other as far as he could go in pursuit of acknowledged dominance. Salerio's unwillingness to show fear or to recognize Shylock's physical power within the scene drove Shylock to find new methods of intimidation. Shylock dug his fingers into Salerio's eye socket, dislodging his eyeball with a sickening snap as he pulled it from Salerio's skull. Shylock flung the eye across the stage as he challenged Salerio with a question: "Hath not a Jew eyes?" He then held out his blood covered hands as he asked "Hath not a Jew hands?"

A centerpiece of any production of *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock's lines beginning with "Hath not a Jew eyes?" joins Jaques' "Seven ages of man" and Hamlet's "To be or not be" as set pieces often quoted out of context, divorced from the character and isolated as an example of Shakespeare's poetic skill. Its equivocation of Jewish and Christian humanities can characterize it as an example of Shakespeare's compassion. Discussed at length in John Barton's *Playing Shakespeare*, both actors David Suchet and Patrick Stewart cite the difficulty in resisting the view of the speech, as in Stewart's words, "a great speech about humanity and a plea for compassion, understanding, and racial tolerance."<sup>68</sup> The tendency to misconstrue the

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<sup>68</sup> John Barton, *Playing Shakespeare* (London: Methuen Drama, 1984), 177.

message of this speech is evident in Charles Isherwood's review of Propeller's *Merchant*, where he referred to the speech as "a quiet argument for Jewish compassion" and later assumes audiences of the play are inclined to be sympathetic to Shylock due to his "his eloquence, humanity and fierce love for his daughter."<sup>69</sup> Isherwood's descriptions, however, are of the speech and character as Isherwood experiences him through his own understanding of Shakespeare's text and are quoted within his review to demonstrate the distance between conventional readings of the play and Propeller's prison re-telling. What is often read as a moment for Shylock to defend his humanity was revealed to be a doctrine of violence: one of the eyes Shylock referenced was left lying on the ground; the hands he spoke of were covered in blood. The shock of the violent performance text demanded those audience members who shared Isherwood's perception of the speech re-examine what is actually being said, particularly Shylock's conclusion that "The villainy you teach me I will execute, it will go hard, but I will better the instruction."<sup>70</sup>

Jessica's actions translated the trial from a father's avenue of revenge to the only means by which Shylock could reclaim his position in the prison structure after an all-too-public loss of power. Thus, the patterns of behavior within Propeller's prison context determined the outcome of the trial before it began. Shylock's decision to pursue the bond was born from masculine dictates that relied on retaliation and escalation, the never ending drive to "better the instruction," and Shylock's determination to attain justice in the form of death carried directly from this demonstration of the prison's escalating spiral of violence. Throughout the trial, the Duke of Venice sat atop a cell and witnessed the maneuverings of the men below.

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<sup>69</sup> Charles Isherwood, "Shylock Schemes Behind Prison Bars," *The New York Times*, 8 May 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/08/theater/reviews/08merc.html>, accessed 3 June 2015.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

After the rings had been exchanged in Belmont, a whistle sounded. The production ended as it had begun. The inmates assembled and the governor, white suit gleaming, cigar in hand, took his place center stage. He again asked: “Which is the Christian and which the Jew?” Those that thought Shylock’s conversion would signal a change within the prison were confronted with the realization that nothing had altered. These same scenes of cruelty and violence, of constant scrambling for position through the use of force would be reenacted over and over again. The repetition of this moment at the production’s conclusion made it clear that what had preceded it was not the answer to this question, but a single unit of an endlessly repeating cycle.

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*The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merchant of Venice* exemplify how the evolution of Propeller’s working practices has resulted in a company that is able to provide complicated readings of Shakespeare’s texts. Both productions reflect Hall’s own readings of the plays and are further examples of his interest in human behavior and violence which characterized *Henry V* and *Rose Rage*. Textual emendation in the form of *Shrew*’s extrapolated text and *Merchant*’s transposed lines and scenes helped to frame each production around its respective thematic interest. In the former instance, the re-imagining of Shakespeare’s induction as an aborted marriage ceremony helped contextualize the taming narrative as Sly’s wish fulfillment fantasy, while the cyclical nature of violence was foregrounded in *Merchant*’s opening and closing moments, also emphasized in the staging of reported moments such as Shylock’s discovery of Jessica’s elopement. Hall’s interpretation of the texts was complimented by Pavelka’s scenic and costume designs. The reflective surfaces used to decorate *Shrew*’s wardrobes and back wall included images of the audience within the design, and costumes



signaled the gender roles on display within the play as caricatures. *Merchant's* jail cells adhered to Pavelka's pseudo-Elizabethan framework through the U-shaped parameter structure and mobile individual cells, both of which were constantly populated by actors who retained their dual identities of prisoner and individual through the layered costume pieces. Use of direct address in *Shrew* helped implicate audiences in Petruchio's cruel treatment of Katherine and the juxtaposition of Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech with acts of gruesome retribution rejected the conventional reading of the speech as a plea for compassion. These are but two examples of how Propeller routinely grounds its productions in Shakespeare's text, seeking ways of delivering the lines so that they resonate with clear meaning. Finally, Propeller's all-male company heavily influenced the interpretations of both plays, as it allowed for excessive physicality and violence in *Shrew* and inspired the homosocial prison environment in *Merchant*. All of these components were strongly contextualized through Propeller's interpretive frameworks and non-illusionistic performance aesthetic, resulting in productions which embraced the complicated issues and relationships inherent within the plays. These two productions encapsulate Propeller's ability to re-interpret Shakespeare's plays through the directorial, design, and acting processes that have evolved throughout the company's history.

## Conclusion: Reviving Propeller

As Propeller has grown, it has become necessary to adapt some of its working practices to new circumstances, such as how Pavelka's scenic designs now need to prepare productions for touring or how the move to London altered how bonds are formed between new and returning actors. By tracking these changes, one can see the various phases of Propeller's history: its early days at the Watermill, its period of company solidification, and its re-introduction of the repertory system, which brought with it the concept of revival. Propeller now finds itself at yet another new phase, potentially altering its producing profile to shift focus from producing new work towards educational outreach. I conclude this project by exploring the context of this next potential phase and investigating how changes in the company affect the production processes heretofore examined.

In 2009, Propeller launched a new initiative called "Pocket Propeller," a series of abbreviated Shakespeare productions based on the company's full-length shows that were designed to tour to both theatres and schools. The inaugural Pocket production took as its inspiration Propeller's recently revived production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but was heavily adapted to accommodate the requirements of its new purpose. Michael Pavelka created a new, more portable scenic design consisting of two umpire chairs and a number of tea chests, and the production itself was devised by the six actors appearing in it, all of whom had previously performed with the company.<sup>1</sup> Over the course of the following two years, *Pocket Dream* visited over thirty different venues across England, aided in part by funding from the Arts Council, which provided free transportation to venues for participating schools.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Abigail Rokison, *Shakespeare for Young People: Productions, Version and Adaptation* (London: Arden, 2013), 125.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-122.

While *Pocket Dream* toured schools, Propeller continued its full-length work, and in November 2011, *Henry V* opened. As with *Pocket Dream* and its touring partner, *The Winter's Tale*, this *Henry V* was created using a previous production as a foundation. However, though the show shared the same conceptual framework and certain performance moments that had originated in the 1997 *Henry V*, the 2011 production was far enough removed from its predecessor to provide ample opportunities for actor contribution. Changes to the script, revisions to Pavelka's scenic design, and the unique skills of the particular cast ensured that though *Henry V* resembled its predecessor, the two productions were fraternal, not identical, twins.

Together, *Pocket Dream* and *Henry V* signaled the next period of development for Propeller. The former showed the company attempting to expand its outreach efforts, while the latter marked another step towards a Propeller history cycle. Further momentum came in March 2011, when it was announced that, for the first time, Propeller would be added to the Arts Council England's national portfolio. As a National Portfolio Organization (NPO), Propeller would receive £265,000 for each of the 2012/3, 2013/4, and 2014/5 seasons.<sup>3</sup> According to the Arts Council, NPO funding is "essential core investment to arts organizations [...] to help them deliver our goals."<sup>4</sup> The Arts Council identifies these goals as excellence, availability to everyone, sustainability, a diverse and skilled workforce, and particular attention to ensuring children and young people are able to enjoy the arts.<sup>5</sup> Though Propeller's all-male and largely white acting company calls into question the extent to which it satisfies the Arts Council's diversity aims, the other four goals defined are clearly

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<sup>3</sup> Simon Rogers, "Arts Council Funding: get the full decisions list," *The Guardian*, 30 March, <http://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2011/mar/30/arts-council-funding-decisions-list#data>, accessed 7 July 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Arts Council England, "Great art and culture for everyone: 10-year strategic framework, 2010-2020," 2nd ed., (2013) 19, [http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/Great\\_art\\_and\\_culture\\_for\\_everyone.pdf](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/Great_art_and_culture_for_everyone.pdf), accessed 26 May 2015.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 39-40.

displayed in the quality of the company's work and its large touring radius. Propeller's new status as an NPO both categorized it as an active contributor to the arts in the United Kingdom as well as provided the financial security to pursue its expanding portfolio.

The perception that Propeller was beginning its next evolution was bolstered by a 2012 press release that outlined the company's plans for the seasons covered by its new NPO status. The first shows to be produced would be revivals of the 2006/7 tour designed to expose new audiences to Propeller's work with productions that had already proven themselves to be successful, and the company's announcement focused on the fact that the shows would visit twelve venues that had not been included on the previous tour.<sup>6</sup> The new tour stops would ensure Propeller continued to honor the Arts Council's concern with availability while the revivals were presented as a regrouping measure in advance of Propeller expanding its repertoire. In a statement that accompanied the press release, Edward Hall explained that "[a]nother benefit of reviving these shows is that it also allows us to create new work in parallel, including our first ever piece of new writing, and a new Shakespeare production for 2013/4."<sup>7</sup> The announcement showed a plan for the company that would allow it to expand its profile through revived productions, honor its commitment to innovation and actor contribution in the creation of new productions, and further evolve by adding new writing to its repertoire.

However, instead of the proposed combination of one new Shakespeare production to tour with a revival after *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night*,

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<sup>6</sup> "Propeller to Tour TWELFTH NIGHT and TAMING OF THE SHREW in 2012/13," Propeller Newsletter, email, 15 May 2012; Caroline Ansdell and Terri Paddock, "Review Round-up: Propeller's Bard *Tames* Critics," *WhatsOnStage*, 19 January 2007, [http://www.whatsonstage.com/west-end-theatre/news/01-2007/review-round-up-propellers-bard-tames-critics\\_21575.html](http://www.whatsonstage.com/west-end-theatre/news/01-2007/review-round-up-propellers-bard-tames-critics_21575.html), accessed 7 July 2015.

<sup>7</sup> "Propeller Theatre Company to Present TWELFTH NIGHT, New Work and More in 2012-13," *Broadway World*, 2 May 2012, <http://www.broadwayworld.com/uk-regional/article/Propeller-Theatre-Company-to-Present-TWELFTH-NIGHT-New-Work-and-More-in-2012-13-20120502>, accessed 26 May 2015.

Propeller revived two more productions, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Comedy of Errors*. This tour continued the work of its predecessor as seven of its fifteen stops had not previously hosted either production. Though the 2013/4 left substantially less time between the productions' original stagings and their revivals — the 2004 *Dream* had already been revived in 2009 and this rendition of *Comedy* was performed in 2011 — the shows nonetheless garnered a strong reception.<sup>8</sup> Peter Kirwan wrote that “it was a pleasure to see that, given the problems of filling the shows of a previous company, this revival had lost none of its sheer hilarity and wistful magic.”<sup>9</sup> The productions' favorable reviews show the company has not lost its commitment to producing quality work, but Kirwan's observation touches on a more troubling aspect of the revival: its effect on Propeller's working practices and the idea of actor ownership.

This project has demonstrated the interconnectivity of the practical concerns that shape a company and its creative work, and the circumstances surrounding Propeller's revivals are no less indicative of this relationship. For one thing, they mark a substantial shift in Edward Hall's directorial presence. Though audience expansion and “building a fan base” is cited as the primary contributing factor to reviving past work, another contributing factor towards the decision may have been Hall's appointment as artistic director of London's Hampstead Theatre in 2010, which was suffering under a debt of almost a million pounds after a major refurbishment and a poor commercial season.<sup>10</sup> Since then, his presence in the Propeller rehearsal rooms

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<sup>8</sup> Velda Harris, “The Comedy of Errors and A Midsummer Night's Dream,” *The British Theatre Guide*, 31 January 2014, <http://britishtheatreinfo.info/reviews/the-comedy-of-e-the-lyceum-she-9843>, accessed 7 July 2015; Michael Hasted, “PROPELLER at the Everyman Cheltenham,” *Stage Talk Magazine*, <http://stagetalkmagazine.com/?p=2786>, accessed 7 July 2015; Emma Poltrack, “*The Comedy of Errors/A Midsummer Night's Dream*,” *Shakespeare Bulletin* 32, no. 3 (2014), 513-519.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Kirwan, “A Midsummer Night's Dream (Propeller) @ Sheffield Lyceum,” *The Bardathon*, 30 January 2014, <https://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/bardathon/2014/01/30/a-midsummer-nights-dream-propeller-sheffield-lyceum/>, accessed 7 July 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Fiona Mountford, “How Edward Hall saved the Hampstead Theatre,” *Evening Standard*, 26 March 2014, <http://www.standard.co.uk/goingout/theatre/how-artistic-director-edward-hall-saved-hampstead-theatre-9216082.html>, accessed 26 May 2015.

has decreased significantly, with many of his directorial duties falling to associate director (and former Propeller actor) Dugald Bruce-Lockhart. Hall's decreased availability and the presence of actors within the revival casts who have not had an opportunity to build a relationship with Propeller over many years raises questions as to whether the personal connectivity between Hall and his actors, which once defined Propeller's organizational structure, still remains.

At the same time, Hall's absence has provided an opportunity for Bruce-Lockhart to expand his role within the company by taking on directorial duties. Appointing Bruce-Lockhart as interim director keeps the work in the Propeller family, while Bruce-Lockhart's familiarity with Propeller's rehearsal room practices (he has acted in nine Propeller productions since 1998) provides a degree of continuity despite Hall's absence. This continuity perpetuates the trust and collaborative spirit upon which Propeller was founded.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Bruce-Lockhart's expanding directorial presence within the company is matched by his work abroad, where he has applied Propeller's production style to mixed-sex companies with successful results. Reviews of his 2013 *Romeo and Juliet* in Barcelona centered their praise on how Bruce-Lockhart was able to successfully utilize Propeller's "hallmarks" — defined by *El Periodico* as "freshness, energy and physicality" — to create an engaging, fast-paced production.<sup>12</sup> The result of Hall lessening his own personal connection to the company is that Bruce-Lockhart is able to increase his contributions as well as gain directorial experience, which helps to disseminate Propeller's practices to other companies and casts.

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<sup>11</sup> Chris Myles, personal interview, London, 11 November 2013; Joseph Chance, personal interview, Coventry, 13 February 2014; James Tucker, personal interview, Stratford-upon-Avon, 12 February 2014.

<sup>12</sup> "Barcelona reviews," trans. Jamie Bruce-Lockhart, Dugald Bruce-Lockhart website, <http://bruce-lockhart.com/wp-content/uploads/Barcelona-reviews.pdf>, accessed 1 June 2015.

Though Hall was a less consistent presence during the rehearsal for these revival productions, there was arguably less need for his oversight as the productions were not being discovered but recreated. Unlike the adapted revivals of *Henry V* and *The Winter's Tale*, Pavelka's scenic and costume designs for the *Shrew/Twelfth Night* and *Dream/Comedy* revival tours remained largely unaltered. Chris Myles defines the difference between working on a revival and working on a new production as the amount of discovery possible. In the former, Myles says the design was something that Hall and Pavelka come with as "a kit for us to play with," whereas in the latter "not only have you got the kit but you know roughly how you want it to fit together."<sup>13</sup> In one, the actors are discovering how they will use the tools they are given, while in the other instance they are working towards a known outcome. In performance, Pavelka's designs continue to achieve their intended function — creating an environmental framework that is representative of the presentational world at the same time that it acknowledges the theatricality of performance — but their functionality in rehearsal is fundamentally altered by virtue of the pre-determination of their utility. Similarly, costume designs carried over from the original to the revival productions. Re-using costume designs did not completely preempt actor contribution, and adjustments were made to accommodate changes in body type or character interpretation as required by the individual actor. More often than not, however, the ideas transferred over and what was altered was how those ideas were executed.<sup>14</sup>

The changes wrought on the functionality of Pavelka's designs in rehearsal speak to the larger concerns raised by the revival productions: the implications for Propeller's acting company. Rather than personally engaging with the work,

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<sup>13</sup> Myles, personal interview.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Pavelka, personal interview, London, 1 May 2014.

Propeller's cast members act as an "honor guard."<sup>15</sup> While certain aspects, such as the performance significance of men performing women's roles, is unaltered, the freedom to create is now not only constrained by Shakespeare's story but also by the work of other actors, some of whom are no longer performing with the company. In discussing his role as Katherine in the revival *Shrew*, Dan Wheeler said

we're told 'this is what happens in this scene' and then we have to go away and work out why that happens. So if you know you've got to run on with your sister locked in a wardrobe, yelling at her and smashing a wardrobe door in her face, you've got to go back to the text and look for what leads you to behave like that.<sup>16</sup>

Wheeler's interview displays enthusiasm for both Propeller and the production, but his description of the rehearsal process is very different than the improvisational layering which was described in chapter 3.<sup>17</sup> Instead, it begins to reveal a different understanding of actor ownership, one which preferences the contributions of previous Propeller actors and leaves incoming members to independently develop a relationship to pre-existing work.

Another example of this kind of ownership is found in the role of music within the revivals. The musical composition for both revival tours was guided by Jon Trenchard, the actor who had served as music captain while acting with the company in those productions' most recent stagings. For *Twelfth Night*, Trenchard's music from the 2007 production was copied quite closely, which changed the music's relationship to the performance onstage. According to Trenchard:

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<sup>15</sup> Chance, personal interview.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Will Wollen, "Interview with Dan Wheeler - actor playing Katherine (Kate)," *The Taming of the Shrew* education pack (Propeller: 2012), 29.

<sup>17</sup> Tucker compares the framework put in place by a previous production to the initial structure provided by Hall, acknowledging a similarity between the two working styles. However, Tucker, Chance, and Wheeler all identify the actor's sense of ownership within revival as coming from his relationship with the text, which indicates a shift away from collaborative creation towards a more individual process. Tucker, personal interview; Chance, personal interview; Ibid.



That original company's performances in rehearsal, I felt, brought out many of the melancholy aspects of the play, and when I composed the music for that production, I wanted the music to complement the melancholy I felt they were finding in the text. But during the rehearsals for the most recent production, I felt that the company were finding more of the play's comic energy, and that the melancholy of the original music didn't fit as aptly as before. I felt that the production had an excitingly different feel, and wondered whether I needed to adapt or completely alter the music to fit the new company's take. In the end, after consulting with Dugald who was directing the rehearsals at that time, we felt that my original music could still work, but this time as more of a melancholy energy in its own right, rather than being inspired by the actors' energy as before.<sup>18</sup>

Trenchard characterizes this change as the music becoming a separate production component rather than an integrated part of an actor's performance. On the one hand, the presence of a musical director external to the acting company limits the opportunities for actors to assume the same level of autonomous leadership as when Propeller's creates new work. On the other hand, Trenchard's position as musical director honors his previous work, respecting the actor's ownership of his own compositions and providing additional opportunities for an individual to stay artistically connected with the company regardless of his presence within the acting company.

These changes to Propeller's producing profile illustrate a different interpretation of collaborative creation and actor ownership than the company has previously demonstrated, and this shift impacts its contribution to Shakespearean performance. While honoring the work of past companies can be seen as a sign of loyalty towards the actors' work, it also limits the extent to which Propeller can be seen as an innovating company. Propeller's NPO status was granted during a period of time in which the company was consistently producing new work as well as promising to expand its range; as an NPO, it revived former productions and toured them to established regional theaters (some of which had hosted Propeller's original stagings).

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<sup>18</sup> Jon Trenchard, personal interview, London, 12 June 2014.

In light of this comparison, it is hard not to speculate that Propeller's programming may have contributed in some way to the company's failure to renew its NPO status in the 2014 Arts Council funding decisions.

These changes can be seen as especially damaging when considering how touring revival productions may be evaluated according to the Arts Council's desire to increase exposure to the arts throughout the United Kingdom. Though much of the information related to the Arts Council's decision is redacted, the information that is available under the Freedom of Information Act shows that the focus during the 2014 decisions was to balance the portfolio, specifically in regards to expanding the areas serviced by the NPOs.<sup>19</sup> Documents relating to the South East Area show relatively small turnover, but those changes that were made sought to bring the arts to under-serviced areas and target young people.<sup>20</sup> To that end, four new theatre organizations were granted NPO status: Gulbenkian Theatre, Creative Arts East, Seachange Arts, and Newbury Corn Exchange.<sup>21</sup> Gulbenkian Theatre satisfies the Arts Council's interest in youth outreach was found to be an "outstanding example of work by, with and for children," while the other three organizations service under-represented areas within the South East region.<sup>22</sup> Propeller aimed to bring its revival productions to audiences who may not have seen their previous stagings, but it remains that the revival tours visited established regional theaters. In the end, it was decided that

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<sup>19</sup> Arts Council England, "South East Area Narrative Report," 13 May 2014, 1. On July 24, 2014, a request was made by an unknown party "for both the stage 1 and 2 exercises all documentation relating to the assessment exercise in relation to Propeller's NPO application, including but not limited to its ratings in relation to meeting criteria (including ACE Goals 1, 2 and 5), the assessment of government and management and financial resilience risk, and the subsequent exercise of 'Balancing the Portfolio'. That documentation should include, but is not limited to, minutes of each and every meeting at which the application was considered, copies of any notes made by each and every attendee, any memorandum or presentation prepared in relation to the assessment exercise, the basis on which the 'Weak' rating in relation to Creative Case was reached and the identification of exactly which applications were preferred 'taking into account the quality and level of Propeller's art form provision nationally'." I replicated the request on May 26, 2015. Information in this paragraph is based on the documents received in response that request.

<sup>20</sup> "South East Area Narrative Report," 2, 5-6; Arts Council England, "Equality Analysis," 12 June 2014, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. The publishing house And Other Stories and the dance company Re:Bourne Ltd. were also new organization added to the South East portfolio.

<sup>22</sup> "South East Area Narrative Report," 7.

“Propeller Theatre Company [redacted] scored strong on contribution to our goals. However, it was considered that there were organizations that contributed more significantly overall to the strength of the portfolio.”<sup>23</sup>

Propeller responded though a statement on its website which offered statistics regarding the company’s scope and critical reception, detailing how “In 2012/13 Propeller performed for 32 weeks in the UK giving 195 performances to 72,867 people, 19,600 of whom were 21 or younger, with 80% of national reviews being 4star plus.”<sup>24</sup> The statement goes on to contextualize Arts Council funding (“19.42% of Propeller’s annual turnover of £1,307,761”) and draw attention to its audience growth and touring reputation.<sup>25</sup> It was accompanied by a statement from Hall that strongly implied the funding cut would cripple Propeller’s touring efforts, saying the cut “prevents the company from forward planning and calls into question the future” as well as “prevent us from continuing to pursue our national touring programme which has delighted so many thousands of people and which will prevent our company from pursuing its commitment to delivering affordable, high quality drama in the regions.”<sup>26</sup>

Since the funding decision, it is difficult to assess whether Hall’s prediction has proven true. While there has been no formal announcement regarding plans to stage and tour full-length productions, the *Edward III* symposium held in January 2015 made frequent references to Propeller’s planned History Cycle, and was, in part, a fundraising exercise to excite interest in the project. The company’s website, Facebook and Twitter pages remain active, indicating a continued interest in marketing the

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<sup>23</sup> Arts Council England, “National Portfolio Funding 2015/16 - 2017/18 - South East Area,” 12 June 2014, 11.

<sup>24</sup> “Arts Council NPO Funding Statement from Edward Hall,” Propeller Website, <http://propeller.org.uk/news/arts-council-npo-funding-statement-from-edward-hall>, accessed 25 October 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

company to new audiences. Most importantly, Propeller has continued to tour its Pocket Propeller productions. While Propeller's full-length productions show a shift from the company's established practices of fostering actor ownership through creation towards a practice of honoring the previous contributions of its members, Pocket Propeller is providing a new structure through which the company can develop and expand, and its centrality to the company's profile has only increased due to Propeller's failure to renew its NPO status. Though the Arts Council cut overall funding to Propeller, it did provide a £142,000 grant so that Propeller could "deliver a one year programme of its Pocket touring model to create new and sustainable touring networks between theatres [*sic*], schools and community groups particularly in areas of low engagement."<sup>27</sup> Since Pocket's inception, Propeller has mounted eight different Pocket tours and expanded its repertoire to include sixty-minute versions of *Henry V*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. At the time of writing, twenty-six actors from Propeller's full-length productions have participated in the program, joined by nine additional actors for whom the Pocket shows served as their Propeller debuts. The Pocket productions therefore aid in connecting Propeller's members back to the main company during periods where full-length shows are not rehearsing or touring. The Pocket productions have been given further prominence since the 2012 launching of "Propeller Play," an educational website designed to take viewers backstage into the production process.<sup>28</sup>

The Pocket program's success and financial security indicate a changing direction for Propeller, from an innovative producing company reinterpreting

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<sup>27</sup> "Arts Council England supports the touring ambitions of South East arts organisations with £255,000 investment," Arts Council England, 4 March 2015, <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/news/arts-council-news/arts-council-england-supports-touring-ambitions-so/>, accessed 1 June 2015.

<sup>28</sup> "Cast Announced for Propeller Theatre's POCKET DREAM UK Tour, Beginning Sept 8," BroadwayWorld, 20 August 2014, <http://www.broadwayworld.com/uk-regional/article/Cast-Announced-for-Propeller-Theatres-POCKET-DREAM-UK-Tour-Beginning-Sept-8-20140820>, accessed 1 June 2015.

Shakespeare's play for modern audiences to a creative educational body. Only time will tell if these changes will complement Propeller's full-length work or replace it. In either scenario, Propeller's performance history serves as an example of how a small, regional company was able to evolve into a significant contributor to the world of Shakespearean performance.

## Appendix A: Propeller Productions

Unless otherwise specified, the following credits apply to all productions:

**Director** Edward Hall  
**Designer** Michael Pavelka  
**Lighting** Ben Ormerod  
**Music** Propeller

Henry V The Watermill Theatre: 6 May 1997 - 7 June 1997		
York / Canterbury / Erpingham / King of France	David Acton	
Westmorland / Fluellen / Burgundy / Governor	Tony Bell	
Exeter / Mistress Quickly	David Birrell	
Cambridge / Orleans / Montjoy	Sam Callis	
Ely / Dauphin	Alexis Daniel	
Scroop / Bardolph / Bates / Constable	Emilio Doorgasingh	
Gloucester / French Prisoner	Matt Flynn	
King Henry V	Jamie Glover	
Bedford / Pistol	Robert Horwell	
Salisbury / Nym / Williams / Alice	Chris Myles	
Sir Thomas Grey / Messenger / Boy / Katherine	James Tucker	
Lighting	Alison Lambert	
Henry V and The Comedy of Errors The Watermill Theatre and touring: 1 June 1998 - 30 November 1998		
Canterbury / King of France / Erpingham / York	David Acton	Adriana
Fluellen / Burgundy	Tony Bell	Egeon / Balthazar / Officer
Dauphin / Ely	Dugald Bruce-Lockhart	Dromio of Ephesus
Mountjoy / Cambridge / Orleans	Sam Callis	Antipholus of Ephesus

**Henry V and The Comedy of Errors**  
**The Watermill Theatre and touring: 1 June 1998 - 30 November 1998**

<b>Exeter / Mistress Quickly</b>	Richard Clothier	<b>Antipholus of Syracuse</b>
<b>Henry V</b>	Alexis Daniel	<b>Pinch</b>
<b>Constable of France</b>	Emilio Doorgasingh	<b>Courtesan</b>
<b>Bardolph / Scroop / Bates / Gloucester / French Prisoner</b>	Matt Flynn	<b>Merchant / Luce / Abbess</b>
<b>Pistol / Bedford</b>	Robert Horwell*	
<b>Boy / Katherine / Grey / Messenger</b>	Jonathan McGuiness	<b>Luciana</b>
<b>Salisbury/ Nym / Williams / Alice</b>	Chris Myles	<b>Angelo</b>

**Tour stops :** Neuss (Germany), London, Malta, Bowness-on-Windermere, Stratford-upon-Avon, Guanajuato (Mexico), Mexico City (Mexico), Rome (Italy), Dhaka (Bangladesh), Colombo (Sri Lanka, Kandy (Sri Lanka), Jakarta (Indonesia), Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia), Manila (Phillipines)

*\*Replaced by Nicholas Asbury in September 1998.*

**Twelfth Night**  
**The Watermill Theatre: 12 May 1999- 19 June 1999**

<b>Olivia</b>	David Acton
<b>Feste</b>	Tony Bell
<b>Sir Andrew Aguecheek</b>	Sam Callis
<b>Malvolio</b>	Richard Clothier
<b>Antonio</b>	Emilio Doorgasingh
<b>Fabian</b>	Matt Flynn
<b>Sir Toby Belch</b>	Robert Horwell
<b>Orsino</b>	Vince Leigh
<b>Sebastian</b>	Jonathan McGuiness
<b>Maria</b>	Chris Myles
<b>Viola</b>	James Tucker

**Masks and Movement:** Robert Horwell

<b>Rose Rage</b> <b>The Watermill Theatre and touring: 3 February 2001 - 10 August 2002</b>		
<b>Role</b>		<b>Replacement Cast (Sept - Nov '01 and June - July '02)</b>
<b>Warwick / Cade</b>	Tony Bell	
<b>Edward IV / Lord Talbot / Weaver</b>	Dugald Bruce-Lockhart	Tim Treloar
<b>Gloucester / Lawyer / Bordeaux / Clerk</b>	Richard Clothier	
<b>Exeter / First Rebel</b>	Emilio Doorgasingh	
<b>Humphrey / Young Clifford / Rivers / Post</b>	Matt Flynn	
<b>Vernon / Margaret / Messenger</b>	Robert Hands	
<b>Clarence / Suffolk / Butcher</b>	Vince Leigh	
<b>King Henry VI / John Talbot / Lady Bona</b>	Jonathan McGuiness	
<b>Prince Edward / Old Clifford / Winchester/ Saye</b>	Chris Myles	
<b>Somerset / Lady Grey / Rutland / Second Rebel / Son</b>	Simon Scardfield	
<b>Stafford / York / King Louis / Father</b>	Guy Williams	
<b>Music devised and arranged by :</b> Dugald Bruce-Lockhart, Vince Leigh, and Tony Bell		
<b>Adapted by:</b> Edward Hall and Roger Warren*		
<b>Tour stops :</b> Clywd (Wales), Crawley, Leicester, Dublin (Ireland), Guildford, Manchester, Warwick, Huddersfield, Bologna (Italy), Istanbul (Turkey), London, Oxford, Gdansk (Poland)		
<i>*Applicable to all subsequent productions.</i>		
<b>A Midsummer Night's Dream</b> <b>The Watermill Theatre and touring: 5 February 2003 - August 2003</b>		
<b>Bottom</b>	Tony Bell	
<b>Lysander</b>	Dugald Bruce-Lockhart	
<b>Titania</b>	Richard Clothier	
<b>Hippolyta</b>	Emilio Doorgasingh	
<b>Theseus</b>	Matt Flynn	
<b>Helena</b>	Robert Hands	
<b>Demetrius / Snout</b>	Vince Leigh	
<b>Hermia / Snug</b>	Jonathan McGuiness	
<b>Quince / Egeus</b>	Chris Myles	



A Midsummer Night's Dream The Watermill Theatre and touring: 5 February 2003 - August 2003		
Puck / Starveling	Simon Scardifield	
Flute	Jules Werner	
Oberon	Guy Williams	
Fairy/ Understudy: Alasdair Craig		
Fairy/ Understudy: Alexander Giles		
Music composed and arranged by: Tony Bell, Dugald Bruce-Lockhart, and Jules Werner		
Tour stops : Barbados, Bromley, Cambridge, Manchester, Guildford, Reading, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Richmond, Oxford, Neuss (Germany), London		
The Winter's Tale The Watermill Theatre and touring: 20 January 2005 - 9 December 2005		
Replacement Cast		
Camillo	Bob Barrett	
Officer / Autolycus	Tony Bell	Jason Baughan
Antigonus / Florizel	Dugald Bruce-Lockhart	Bill Buckhurst
Leontes	Richard Clothier	Vince Leigh
First Lady / Cleomenes / Mariner	Alasdair Craig	
Polixenes	Vince Leigh	Matt Flynn
Paulina	Adam Levy	
Dion	Chris Myles	
Hermione / Dorcas	Simon Scardifield	
Emilia / Young Shepherd	James Tucker	
First Lord / Mopsa	Jules Werner	Jamie Beamish
Mamillius / Time / Perdita	Tam Williams	
Movement: Adam Levy		
Music by: Tony Bell, Dugald Bruce-Lockhart, Jules Wener, Richard Clothier		
Tour stops : Malvern, Guildford, Salford, Liverpool, Oxford, Richmond, Newcatle-upon-Tyne, Neuss (Germany), Swindon (Wales), Glasgow (Scotland), Portsmouth, Dublin (Ireland), Cambridge, Canterbury, Madrid (Spain), New York City (U.S.A.), Berkeley (U.S.A.), Washington D.C. (U.S.A.), Girona (Spain), Aberystwyth (Wales), Guangzhou (China)		

<b>Twelfth Night and the Taming of the Shrew</b> <b>The Watermill Theatre and touring: 14 September 2006 - 30 June 2007</b>		
<b>The Taming of the Shrew</b>		<b>Twelfth Night</b>
<b>Baptista</b>	Bob Barrett	<b>Malvolio</b>
<b>Grumio / Pedant</b>	Jason Baughan	<b>Sir Toby Belch</b>
<b>Tranio</b>	Tony Bell	<b>Feste</b>
<b>Christopher Sly / Petruchio</b>	Dugald Bruce-Lockhart	<b>Olivia</b>
<b>Biondello</b>	Alasdair Craig	<b>Antonio</b>
<b>Curtis</b>	Joe (Johnny) Flynn	<b>Sebastian</b>
<b>Gremio / Vincentio</b>	Chris Myles	<b>Maria</b>
<b>Katherine</b>	Simon Scardifield	<b>Sir Andrew Aguecheek</b>
<b>Hortensio</b>	Jack Tarlton	<b>Orsino</b>
<b>A tailor / A widow</b>	Dominic Tighe	<b>Captain</b>
<b>Curio / Bianca</b>	Jon Trenchard	<b>Curio / Priest</b>
<b>Lucentio</b>	Tam Williams	<b>Viola</b>
<b>Understudy:</b> Tom McDonald		
<b>Lighting Designers:</b> Mark Howland and Ben Ormerod		
<b>Tour stops :</b> London, Perth (Australia), Hong Kong, Brooklyn (U.S.A.), Cambridge, Salford, Poole, Guildford, Cheltenham, Oxford, Milan (Italy), Neuss (Germany), Newbury		
<b>The Merchant of Venice and A Midsummer Night's Dream</b> <b>The Watermill Theatre and touring: 3 December 2008 - 3 August 2009</b>		
<b>The Merchant of Venice</b>		<b>A Midsummer Night's Dream</b>
<b>Antonio</b>	Bob Barrett	<b>Bottom</b>
<b>Portia</b>	Kelsey Brookfield	<b>Snout</b>
<b>The Duke</b>	Babou Ceesay	<b>Helena</b>
<b>Shylock</b>	Richard Clothier	<b>Oberon</b>
<b>Lorenzo</b>	Richard Dempsey	<b>Titania</b>
<b>Lancelot Gobbo</b>	John Dougall	<b>Flue</b>
<b>Gratiano</b>	Richard Frame	<b>Hermia / Snug</b>
<b>Morocco / Preacher</b>	Jonathan Livingstone	<b>Hippolyta</b>
<b>Nerissa</b>	Chris Myles	<b>Quince / Egeus</b>
<b>Monsieur le Bon</b>	David Newman*	<b>Moth</b>

The Merchant of Venice and A Midsummer Night's Dream The Watermill Theatre and touring: 3 December 2008 - 3 August 2009		
The Merchant of Venice		A Midsummer Night's Dream
<b>Tubal / Aragon</b>	Thomas Padden	<b>Theseus</b>
Salerio	Sam Swainsbury	<b>Demetrius</b>
Bassanio	Jack Tarlton	<b>Lysander</b>
Jessica	Jon Trenchard	<b>Puck / Starveling</b>
<b>Additional musical arrangement and composition:</b> Jon Trenchard		
<b>Tour stops :</b> Poole, Liverpool, Aberystwyth, Norwich, Kingston, Rome, Newbury, New York City (U.S.A.), Milan (Italy), Cheltenham, Salford, Oxford, Neuss (Germany), Tokyo (Japan), Galway (Ireland), Gdansk (Poland)		
<i>* David Newman replaced Emmanuel Idowu, who originated the roles of Monsieur le Bon / Preacher and Hippolyta in the production before leaving the tour.</i>		
Richard III and The Comedy of Errors Touring: 18 November 2010 - 7 August 2011		
Richard III		The Comedy of Errors
<b>Margaret</b>	Tony Bell	Pinch
<b>Rivers / Duchess of York</b>	Kelsey Brookfield	Courtesan
<b>Ratcliffe</b>	Dugald Bruce-Lockhart	Antipholus of Syracuse
<b>Ely</b>	Wayne Cater	Balthasar
<b>Richard III</b>	Richard Clothier	Duke
<b>Clarence / Stanley</b>	John Dougall	Aegeon
<b>Murderer / Prince Richard</b>	Richard Frame	Dromio of Syracuse
<b>King Edward IV / Richmond</b>	Robert Hands	Adriana
<b>Buckingham</b>	Chris Myles	Luce / Aemilia
<b>Catesby</b>	David Newman	Luciana
<b>Hastings / Norfolk</b>	Thomas Padden	Angelo
<b>Murderer / Prince Edward</b>	Sam Swainsbury	Antipholus of Ephesus
<b>Elizabeth</b>	Dominic Tighe	Officer
<b>Anne</b>	Jon Trenchard	Dromio of Ephesus
<b>Additional musical arrangement and composition:</b> Jon Trenchard		
<b>Scrivener's Rap:</b> Tony Bell		
<b>Sound:</b> David Gregory*		

Richard III and The Comedy of Errors Touring: 18 November 2010 - 7 August 2011		
Richard III		The Comedy of Errors
<b>Tour stops :</b> Coventry, Guildford, Girona (Spain), Sheffield, Edinburgh, Cheltenham, Salford, New York City (U.S.A.), Ann Arbor (U.S.A.), Newbury, Plymouth, Madrid (Spain), Boston (U.S.A.), London, Neuss (Germany), Galway (Ireland), Helsingor (Denmark)		
<i>*Applicable to all subsequent productions.</i>		
Henry V and The Winter's Tale Touring: 9 November 2011 - 21 July 2012		
Henry V		The Winter's Tale
Williams	Ben Allen	Mamillius / Perdita / Time
Montjoy / Grey	Nicholas Asbury	Polixenes
Mistress Quickly / Fluellen	Tony Bell	Officer / Autolycus
Henry V	Dugald Bruce-Lockhart	Antigonus
Canterbury / Dauphin	Gunnar Cauthery	Lord of Sicilia / Emilia / Mops
Boy / Scroop / Katherine	Karl Davies	Cleomenes / Young Shepherd
Cambridge / Orleans / Burgundy	Richard Dempsey	Hermione / Dorcas
French King / Erpingham / York	John Dougall	Dion / Old Shepherd
Ely / Constable of France	Robert Hands	Leontes
Nym / Salisbury	Finn Hanlon	Mariner / Florizel
Pistol	Vince Leigh	Paulina
Exeter / Alice	Chris Myles	Camillo
Bardolph / Bates	Gary Shelford	First Lady
Westmorland / Governor of Harfleur / Monsieur le Fer	Dominic Thorburn	Lord of Sicilia
<b>Additional music:</b> Gunnar Cauthery and Nick Asbury ( <i>Henry V</i> )		
<b>Movement</b> ( <i>The Winter's Tale</i> ): Gary Shelford		
<b>Tour stops :</b> Guilford, Brighton, Milton Keynes, Girona (Spain), Cheltenham, Sheffield, Salford, Perth (Australia), New Zealand, Kingston, Canterbury, Newbury, Newcastle, Coventry, Norwich, Plymouth, Neuss (Germany), London		
Twelfth Night and The Taming of the Shrew (revival) Touring: 8 November 2012 - 20 July 2013		
Twelfth Night		The Taming of the Shrew
Olivia	Ben Allen	Biondello

Twelfth Night and The Taming of the Shrew (revival) Touring: 8 November 2012 - 20 July 2013		
Twelfth Night		The Taming of the Shrew
Second Officer	Darrell Brockis	Vincentio
Viola	Joseph Chance	Curtis
Sir Andrew Aguecheek	John Dougall	Gremio
Antonio	Finn Hanlon	Lucentio
First Officer	Lewis Hart	Servant
Orsino	Christopher Heywood	A tailor / A widow
Sir Toby Belch	Vince Leigh	Christopher Sly
Malvolio	Chris Myles	Baptista
Feste	Liam O'Brien	Tranio
Sea Captain	Benjamin O'Mahoney	Grumio / A pedant
Sebastian	Dan Wheeler	Katherine
Priest	Arthur Wilson	Bianca
Additional musical arrangement and composition: Jon Trenchard		
Associate Director: Dugald Bruce-Lockhart		
<b>Tour stops :</b> Coventry, Guildford, Nanterre (France), Girona (Italy), Norwich, Plymouth, Ann Arbor (U.S.A.), Minneapolis (U.S.A.), Salford, Cheltenham, Kingston, Newcastle, Sheffield, Milan (Italy), Nottingham, Madrid (Spain), Neuss (Germany), Canterbury, London.		
A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Comedy of Errors (revival) Touring: 6 November 2013 - 28 June 2014		
A Midsummer Night's Dream		The Comedy of Errors
Egeus /Quince	David Acton	Angelo
Oberon	Darrell Brockis	Pinch
Robin Goodfellow	Joseph Chance	Antipholus of Ephesus
Flute	Alasdair Craig	Aemilia
Hippolyta	Will Featherstone	Dromio of Syracuse
Theseus	Dominic Gerrard	The Duke
Snout	Lewis Hart	Balthasar
Snug / Hermia	Matthew McPherson	Dromio of Ephesus
Bottom	Chris Myles	Aegeon

A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Comedy of Errors (revival) Touring: 6 November 2013 - 28 June 2014		
A Midsummer Night's Dream		The Comedy of Errors
<b>Starveling</b>	Matthew Pearson	<b>Courtesan</b>
<b>Lysander</b>	Richard Pepper	<b>Officer</b>
<b>Titania</b>	James Tucker	<b>Adriana</b>
<b>Helena</b>	Dan Wheeler	<b>Antipholus of Syracuse</b>
<b>Demetrius</b>	Arthur Wilson	<b>Luciana</b>
<b>Additional musical direction:</b> Jon Trenchard		
<b>Associate Director:</b> Dugald Bruce-Lockhart		
<b>Tour stops :</b> Sheffield, Coventry, Nottingham, Salford, Canterbury, Kingston, Cheltenham, Norwich, Newcastle, Marseille (France), Edinburgh, Craiova (Romania), Caracal (Romania), Plymouth, Istanbul (Turkey), Brighton, Guildford, Neuss (Germany)		

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— . Performances viewed during UK tour: Guilford, Coventry.

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*Richard III* (2010), by William Shakespeare, adapted by Edward Hall and Roger Warren, Propeller. Dir. Edward Hall.

— . DVD recording. Care of Caro McKay. Broadway, UK.

— . Performances viewed during the UK tour: Coventry, Sheffield, London.

*Rose Rage* (2001), by William Shakespeare, adapted by Edward Hall and Roger Warren, Propeller. Dir. Edward Hall. Specific references cited in text.

*The Taming of the Shrew* (2006), by William Shakespeare, adapted by Edward Hall and Roger Warren, Propeller. Dir. Edward Hall.  
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